

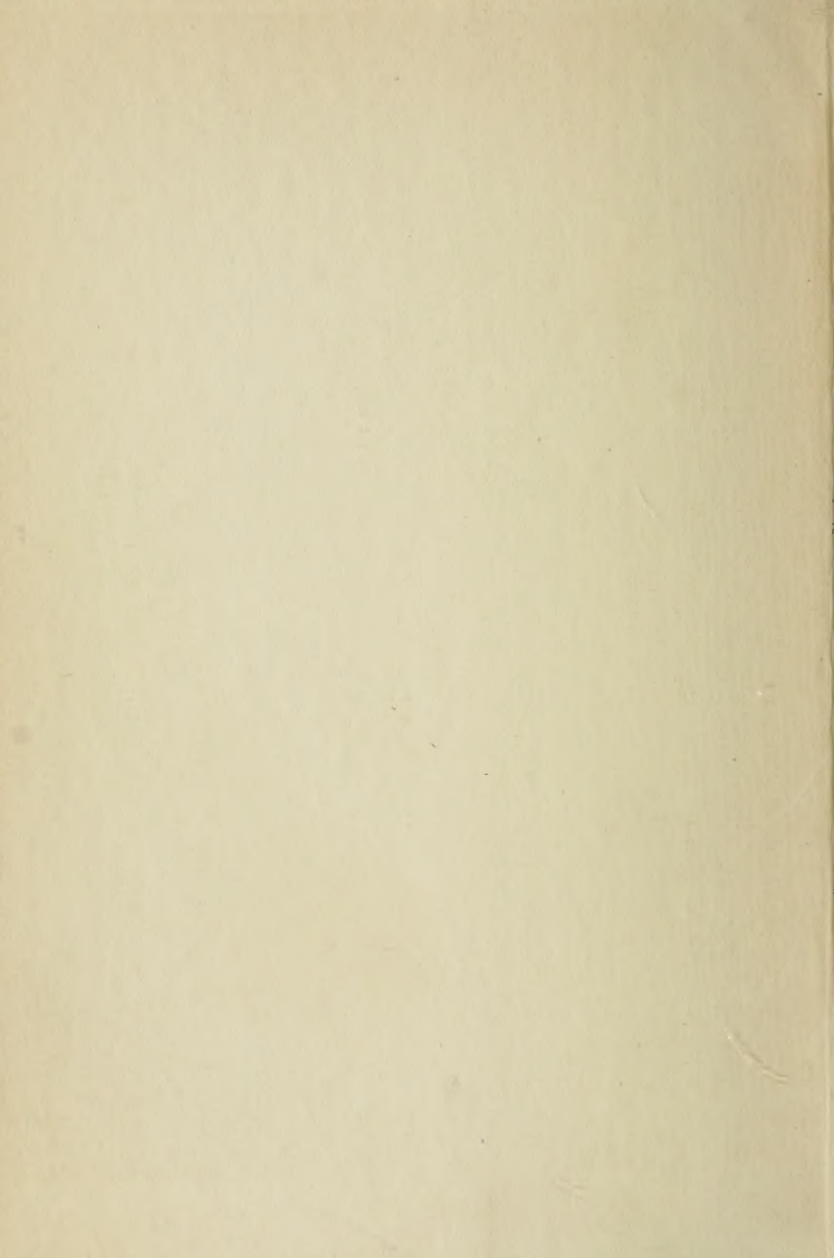
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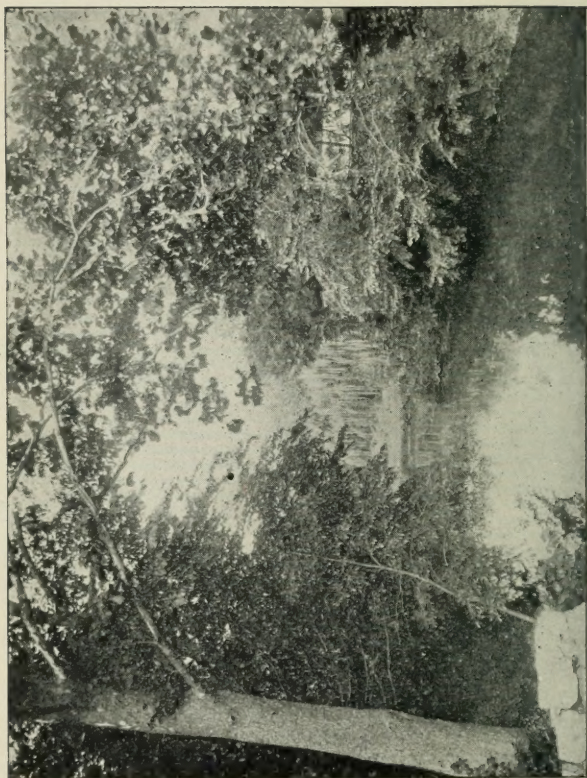
ETTI'S
EMS





63
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To Ruth
from Lorraine



THE
POETICAL WORKS

OF

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

WITH MEMOIR BY

WILLIAM L. KEESE



New York
Hurst & Company
Publishers

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TO

WILLIAM MICHAEL ROSSETTI,

TO SO MANY OF WHICH, SO MANY YEARS BACK, HE GAVE THE FIRST
BROTHERLY HEARING, ARE NOW AT LAST DEDICATED.

1870-1881.

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MEMOIR.

The unique genius, whose poetical works are here offered to the public, and whose potent influence upon the world of art and letters is yet to be fully realized, was early called from haunting dreams of heart-longing, and perhaps even in the dawning of a conception that awaited his matured powers. Fifty-three years only were his, when, in April, 1882, his remains were laid in the little church-yard at Birchington, on the Kentish sea-board.

The subject of this memoir belonged to a remarkable family. His father, Gabriel Rossetti, was an active participant in the constitutional struggle with King Ferdinand in 1821, and his name is held in grateful memory in the town of Vasto where he was born; not only for his conscientious political attitude, but also for his patriotic poems which excited great popular enthusiasm. His mother was Frances Polidori, a connection of the Dr. Polidori who was Lord Byron's fellow traveler, and, we believe, is still living. The father died in 1854. His elder sister, Maria Francesca, was the author of "A Shadow of Dante," a work revealing an intimate acquaintance with, and a sympathetic appreciation of, the great Florentine epic. His younger brother, William Michael, is still well known as a poet, but his distinction in that regard is eclipsed by his fame as literary and art critic, his essays in that department of authorship being of marked ability. Of his younger sister, Christina Georgina, it is only needful to remark that her charming lyrics are familiar to countless households in America, and that Miss Rossetti's fame as a poetess is held in esteem and admiration second only to that of Jean Ingelow.

Of this gifted family Dante Gabriel,* the second child, was the most richly endowed. He was born in London on the 12th of May, 1828, and his education was begun at a private school;

* He was christened Gabriel Charles Dante.

then he went to King's College School, where he remained until he was fifteen, and where the elements of Latin, French, and German, were acquired. The Italian language, of course, was familiar and easy to him. At this period an inclination towards painting so strongly manifested itself, that an arrangement was made for him to enter an Art Academy at Bloomsbury, and thence he was admitted to the Royal Academy Antique School. His evenings were employed in intellectual exercises, reading and translating, with now and then a venture in original composition. We may note at this point that the development of his poetic faculty was more rapid and marked than his progress in the sister art of painting. "My Sister's Sleep" and "The Blessed Damozel" were produced in his nineteenth year; the latter evinces an imagination so fine, and is so replete with spiritual beauty, that we seek in vain for its parallel in the history of precocious literature. Bryant at the same age wrote "Thanatopsis;" but though the solemn pathos and grave import of that noble poem are unique as an emanation of youth, still there is something in the conception and in the white-winged spirit of "The Blessed Damozel," that seems to invest it with a poetic halo, and to give it a sacred significance.

The childhood of the Rossetti family, be it said, was altogether exceptional and astonishing. Their favorite picture-book seems to have been Retzsch's *Outlines from Hamlet*; and while other children were busy with spelling-blocks and object lessons, these tender aspirants were forming an acquaintance with Shakespeare and Dante. The influence thus early begun ruled with a "scepter of fascination" over those young minds; and in the case of our subject the sway augmented to the last. It is said that even at the age of five he composed a rough drama which was undoubtedly an outcome of the effect produced by *Hamlet*.

A second poem was written after leaving school, entitled 'Sir Hugh the Heron,' and for the next few years he studied German and Italian poetry, and began the translations which were subsequently given to the world as *Dante and his Circle*. And now with assured wing he dreamed of loftier flights, when, in 1848, he raised the banner of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

The design of this sketch will not permit any exposition or argument with regard to this celebrated art fraternity. It is presumed that something is known of the movement that enlisted so many names of eminence; of the art principle which was its main-spring; and of the meritorious purpose to which it was dedicated. Let it suffice that, though no revolution followed the sincere examples of the Brotherhood, the experiment was not without its fruit; for from it, whatever the influence it exerted on schools of painting, flowed a new and impressive order of poetry.

The Brotherhood issued a magazine designed as an organ for their sentiments. It was named *The Germ*, and though reaching but four numbers, contained much that was remarkable both in art and literature. In its pages appeared the lyrics of Miss Rossetti; "The Blessed Damozel," "Sea Limits," "My Sister's Sleep," of D. G. Rossetti, besides several sonnets. W. M. Rossetti and Coventry Patmore were also among the contributors, and the illustrations were from the pencils of Messrs. Holman Hunt and Madox Brown; the last named artist was not a member of the Brotherhood, but was Rossetti's firm friend and art counsellor. One can fancy what a fabulous price would be paid now for a complete set of the adventurous journal.

In the years that followed, up to 1860, Rossetti wrote many of his most admired productions; but he did not publish, and his writings were known only in manuscript. But he was only 23 years old when "Sister Helen," "The Blessed Damozel," "My Sister's Sleep," "Sea Limits," and "Hand and Soul," (the last a prose composition of fine force,) were produced; while in painting he had given some striking examples. Add to this accomplishment the labor suggested by his translations; the minute attention bestowed upon every conception whether of poetry or painting; the patience and zeal with which all execution was wrought;—and an idea may be formed of the conscientious industry of this young genius.

Previous to 1860 he had made the acquaintance of William Morris, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and the future artist, Burne-Jones. The influence of the three poets will not soon pass away from the realm of English literature. The Sonnets of *The House of Life* will live to exalt our better

nature ; the lingering cadence of "The Earthly Paradise" will not cease to charm; and the straining eye will follow many a Ballad flight into new regions of melodious song.

Mr. Rossetti married in 1860. His wife was Elizabeth Eleanor Siddall, and her lovely presence during their brief wedded life was the inspiration of a number of his most beautiful paintings. She died in 1862, and the shock of her sudden death brought a sorrow not to be expressed in words. From the dark cloud of this bereavement loomed the image of despair. Life seemed bereft of aim and hope. With the loss of that companionship all else seemed vain, and in the grave of his wife he buried the manuscripts which were the sole record of his poetical achievements. "He buried with her," says one of his biographers, "not only his love, but his dreams, his fame." Through the advice of friends, who deemed the sacrifice too great, the manuscripts were restored to light after a lapse of eight years.

In 1870 the poet's first volume was given to the world. It was received with a kind of startled wonder; the beauty, pathos, and lofty spirit of the poems revealing the existence of a powerful and gifted singer. It is not the purpose of this article to enter upon a review of the poetical works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. To those who seek exhaustive treatment of his creations as they appear in pen and pencil, we commend the recent work of William Sharp—a volume that leaves no question unanswered.

It is melancholy to think of Rossetti's death in full intellectual maturity. The insomnia which for years had afflicted him he endeavored to subdue by the use of chloral. A fit of illness followed, and it was some time before his native vigor rallied from the prostration. For several years thereafter his health seemed restored, and he labored with wonted industry at the paintings with which his mind was filled. But his strength never fully returned, and the insomnia continued. During this unhappy period, however, the great pictures of "Dante's Dream" and "Proserpina" were completed, and the poems of "The White Ship" and "The King's Tragedy" were written. He succumbed at last to bodily disease, and with tranquil spirit and clear mind awaited the end. It came on Easter Sunday, April, 1882.

Some reference may now be made to the poems contained in the present volume, and the thoughtful reader will wonder at the genius that produced such works as "The Blessed Damsel," "Troy Town," "Eden Bower," "Sister Helen," "Jenny," and "A Last Confession." Of "The Blessed Damsel" we have spoken more than once, but we return to it to point out a few of its entrancing lines. What can be lovelier than the simile in the first verse—

"Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even."

And the spiritual suggestiveness of the lines in the third—

"The wonder was not yet quite gone
From that still look of hers."

And few things to us are comparable in fine imaginative fervor with the whole seventh stanza—

"Around her, lovers, newly met
'Mid deathless love's acclaims,
Spoke evermore among themselves
Their heart-remembered names;
And the souls mounting up to God
Went by her like thin flames."

But the whole poem might be quoted, for every verse has a beauty of its own.

"Troy Town" will appeal to all lovers of the Greek myths, and "Eden Bower" will be read again and again, for the subtle grace and power with which the old tradition is rendered. "Sister Helen" is terrible in its weird consummation of a vengeance, but so exciting to the imagination that one seems, indeed, to read it by a supernatural light. "A Last Confession" has all the intensity of Browning, in its vivid presentment of a consuming remorse. The many lyrics will charm by their themes and richness of expression; and the Sonnets, which by many are deemed the crown and culmination of the poet's genius, will repay, by their deep sincerity, spiritual elevation, and felicitous command of language, the most attentive and thoughtful perusal.

Let us say in conclusion, that the present writer has made no attempt to celebrate the achievements of Rossetti in the domain of painting; that being a subject on which he is incompetent to speak; his object having been simply to preface this edition of the poet's works with a suitable memoir of the author.

W. L. K.

POEMS.

By DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI.

THE BLESSED DAMOZEL.

THE blessed damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of Heaven ;
Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even ;
She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were seven.

Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,
No wrought flowers did adorn,
But a white rose of Mary's gift,
For service meetly worn ;
Her hair that lay along her back
Was yellow like ripe corn.

Her seemed she scarce had been a day
One of God's choristers ;
The wonder was not yet quite gone
From that still look of hers ;
Albeit, to them she left, her day
Had counted as ten years.

(To one, it is ten years of years.
. . . Yet now, and in this place,
Surely she leaned o'er me — her hair
Fell all about my face. . . .
Nothing : the autumn fall of leaves.
The whole year sets apace.)

THE BLESSED DAMOZEL.

It was the rampart of God's house
That she was standing on ;
By God built over the sheer depth
The which is Space begun ;
So high, that looking downward thence
She scarce could see the sun.

It lies in Heaven, across the flood
Of ether, as a bridge.
Beneath, the tides of day and night
With flame and darkness ridge
The void, as low as where this earth
Spins like a fretful midge.

Around her, lovers, newly met
'Mid deathless love's acclaims,
Spoke evermore among themselves
Their heart-remembered names ;
And the souls mounting up to God
Went by her like thin flames.

And still she bowed herself and stooped
Out of the circling charm ;
Until her bosom must have made
The bar she leaned on warm,
And the lilies lay as if asleep
Along her bended arm.

From the fixed place of Heaven she saw
Time like a pulse shake fierce
Through all the worlds. Her gaze still strove
Within the gulf to pierce
Its path ; and now she spoke as when
The stars sang in their spheres.

The sun was gone now ; the curled moon
Was like a little feather
Fluttering far down the gulf ; and now
She spoke through the still weather.

Her voice was like the voice the stars
Had when they sang together.

(Ah sweet ! Even now, in that bird's song,
Strove not her accents there,
Fain to be hearkened ? When those bells
Possessed the mid-day air,
Strove not her steps to reach my side
Down all the echoing stair ?)

"I wish that he were come to me,
For he will come," she said.
"Have I not prayed in Heaven ? — on earth,
Lord, Lord, has he not pray'd ?
Are not two prayers a perfect strength ?
And shall I feel afraid ?

"When round his head the aureole clings,
And he is clothed in white,
I'll take his hand and go with him
To the deep wells of light ;
As unto a stream we will step down,
And bathe there in God's sight.

"We two will stand beside that shrine,
Occult, withheld, untrod,
Whose lamps are stirred continually
With prayer sent up to God ;
And see our old prayers, granted, melt
Each like a little cloud.

"We two will lie i' the shadow of
That living mystic tree
Within whose secret growth the Dove
Is sometimes felt to be,
While every leaf that His plumes touch
Saith His Name audibly

"And I myself will teach to him,
I myself, lying so,
The songs I sing here ; which his voice
Shall pause in, hushed and slow,
And find some knowledge at each pause,
Or some new thing to know."

(Alas ! We two, we two, thou say'st !
Yea, one wast thou with me
That once of old. But shall God lift
To endless unity
The soul whose likeness with thy soul,
Was but its love for thee ?)

"We two," she said, "will seek the groves
Where the lady Mary is,
With her five handmaidens, whose names
Are five sweet symphonies,
Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen,
Margaret and Rosalys.

"Circlewise sit they, with bound locks
And foreheads garlanded ;
Into the fine cloth white like flame
Weaving the golden thread,
To fashion the birth-robcs for them
Who are just born, being dead.

"He shall fear, haply, and be dumb :
Then will I lay my cheek
To his, and tell about our love,
Not once abashed or weak :
And the dear Mother will approve
My pride, and let me speak.

"Herself shall bring us, hand in hand,
To Him round whom all souls
Kneel, the clear-ranged unnumbered heads
Bowed with their aureoles :

And angels meeting us shall sing
To their citherns and citoles.

"There will I ask of Christ the Lord
Thus much for him and me :—
Only to live as once on earth
With Love, only to be,
As then awhile, for ever now
Together, I and he."

She gazed and listened and then said,
Less sad of speech than mild, —
"All this is when he comes." She ceased.
The light thrilled towards her, fill'd
With angels in strong level flight.
Her eyes prayed, and she smil'd.

(I saw her smile.) But soon their path
Was vague in distant spheres :
And then she cast her arms along
The golden barriers,
And laid her face between her hands,
And wept. (I heard her tears.)

LOVE'S NOCTURN.

MASTER of the murmuring courts
Where the shapes of sleep convene !—
Lo ! my spirit here exhorts
All the powers of thy demesne
For their aid to woo my queen.
What reports
Yield thy jealous courts unseen ?

Vaporous, unaccountable,
Dreamland lies forlorn of light,
Hollow like a breathing shell.

Ah ! that from all dreams I might
 Choose one dream and guide its flight !
 I know well
 What her sleep should tell to-night.

There the dreams are multitudes :
 Some that will not wait for sleep,
 Deep within the August woods ;
 Some that hum while rest may steep
 Weary labor laid a-heap ;
 Interludes,
 Some, of grievous moods that weep.

Poets' fancies all are there :
 There the elf-girls flood with wings
 Valleys full of plaintive air ;
 There breathe perfumes ; there in rings
 Whirl the form-bewildered springs ;
 Siren there
 Winds her dizzy hair and sings.

Thence the one dream mutually
 Dreamed in bridal unison,
 Less than waking ecstasy ;
 Half-formed visions that make moan
 In the house of birth alone ;
 And what we
 At death's wicket see, unknown.

But for mine own sleep, it lies
 In one gracious form's control,
 Fair with honorable eyes,
 Lamps of a translucent soul :
 O their glance is loftiest dole,
 Sweet and wise,
 Wherein Love describes his goal.

Reft of her, my dreams are all
 Clammy trance that fears the sky :
 Changing footpaths shift and fall ;

From polluted coverts nigh,
Miserable phantoms sigh ;
 Quakes the pall
And the funeral goes by.

Master, is it soothly said
 That, as echoes of man's speech
Far in secret clefts are made,
 So do all men's bodies reach
 Shadows o'er thy sunken beach,—
 Shape or shade
In those halls portrayed of each ?

Ah ! might I, by thy good grace
 Groping in the windy stair,
(Darkness and the breath of space
 Like loud waters everywhere),
 Meeting mine own image there
 Face to face,
Send it from that place to her !

Nay, not I ; but oh ! do thou,
 Master, from thy shadow kind
Call my body's phantom now :
 Bid it bear its face declin'd
 Till its flight her slumbers find,
 And her brow
Feel its presence bow like wind.

Where in groves the gracile Spring
 Trembles, with mute orison
Confidently strengthening,
 Water's voice and wind's as one
 Shed an echo in the sun.
 Soft as Spring,
Master, bid it sing and moan.

Song shall tell how glad and strong
 Is the night she soothes away ;
Moan shall grieve with that parched tongue
 Of the brazen hours of day :

Sounds as of the springtide they,
Moan and song,
While the chill months long for May

Not the prayers which with all leave
The world's fluent woes prefer,—
Not the praise the world doth give,
Dulcet fulsome whisperer ; —
Let it yield my love to her,
And achieve
Strength that shall not grieve or err.

Wheresoe'er my dreams befall,
Both at night-watch, (let it say),
And where round the sun-dial
The reluctant hours of day,
Heartless, hopeless of their way,
Rest and call ; —
There her glance doth fall and stay.

Suddenly her face is there :
So do mounting vapors wreath
Subtle-scented transports where
The black fir-wood sets its teeth
Part the boughs and look beneath,—
Lilies share
Secret waters there, and breathe.

Master, bid my shadow bend
Whispering thus till birth of light,
Lest new shapes that sleep may send
Scatter all its work to flight ; —
Master, master of the night,
Bid it spend
Speech, song, prayer, and end aright.

Yet, ah me ! if at her head
There another phantom lean
Murmuring o'er the fragrant bed,—

Ah ! and if my spirit's queen
Smile those alien words between,—
Ah ! poor shade !
Shall it strive, or fade unseen ?

How should love's own messenger
Strive with love and be love's foe !
Master, nay ! If thus, in her,
Sleep a wedded heart should show,—
Silent let mine image go,
Its old share
Of thy spell-bound air to know.

Like a vapor wan and mute,
Like a flame, so let it pass ;
One low sigh across her lute,
One dull breath against her glass ;
And to my sad soul, alas !
One salute
Cold as when death's foot shall pass.

Then, too, let all hopes of mine,
All vain hopes by night and day,
Slowly at thy summoning sign
Rise up pallid and obey.
Dreams, if this is thus, were they :—
Be they thine,
And to dreamworld pine away.

Yet from old time, life, not death,
Master, in thy rule is rife :
Lo ! through thee, with mingling breath,
Adam woke beside his wife.
O Love bring me so, for strife,
Force and faith,
Bring me so not death but life !

Yea, to Love himself is pour'd
This frail song of hope and fear.
Thou art Love, of one accord

With kind Sleep to bring her near,
 Still-eyed, deep-eyed, ah how dear !
 Master, Lord,
 In her name implor'd, O hear !

TROY TOWN.

HEAVENBORN HELEN, Sparta's queen,
 (*O Troy Town !*)
 Had two breasts of heavenly sheen,
 The sun and moon of the heart's desire ;
 All Love's lordship lay between.
 (*O Troy's down,*
 Tall Troy's on fire !)

Helen knelt at Venus' shrine,
 (*O Troy Town !*)
 Saying, "A little gift is mine,
 A little gift for a heart's desire.
 Hear me speak and make me a sign !
 (*O Troy's down,*
 Tall Troy's on fire !)

"Look, I bring thee a carven cup ;
 (*O Troy Town !*)
 See it here as I hold it up,—
 Shaped it is to the heart's desire,
 Fit to fill when the gods would sup.
 (*O Troy's down,*
 Tall Troy's on fire !)

"It was molded like my breast ;
 (*O Troy Town !*)
 He that sees it may not rest,
 Rest at all for his heart's desire.
 O give ear to my heart's behest !
 (*O Troy's down,*
 Tall Troy's on fire !)

Venus looked on Helen's gift,
 (*O Troy Town !*)
 Looked and smiled with subtle drift,
 Saw the work of her heart's desire : —
 "There thou kneel'st for Love to lift !"
 (*O Troy's down,*
 Tall Troy's on fire !)

Venus looked in Helen's face,
 (*O Troy Town !*)
 Knew far off an hour and place,
 And fire lit from the heart's desire ;
 Laughed and said, "Thy gift hath grace !"
 (*O Troy's down,*
 Tall Troy's on fire !)

Cupid looked on Helen's breast,
 (*O Troy Town !*)
 Saw the heart within its nest,
 Saw the flame of the heart's desire,—
 Marked his arrow's burning crest.
 (*O Troy's down,*
 Tall Troy's on fire !)

Cupid took another dart,
 (*O Troy Town !*)
 Fledged it for another heart,
 Winged the shaft with the heart's desire,
 Drew the string and said, "Depart !"
 (*O Troy's down,*
 Tall Troy's on fire !)

Paris turned upon his bed,
 (*O Troy Town !*)
 Turned upon his bed and said,
 Dead at heart with the heart's desire,—
 "O to clasp her golden head !"
 (*O Troy's down,*
 Tall Troy's on fire !)

THE BURDEN OF NINEVEH.

In our Museum galleries
 To-day I lingered o'er the prize
 Dead Greece vouchsafes to living eyes,—
 Her Art for ever in fresh wise
 From hour to hour rejoicing me.
 Sighing I turned at last to win
 Once more the London dirt and din ;
 And as I made the swing-door spin
 And issued, they were hoisting in
 A wingèd beast from Nineveh.

A human face the creature wore,
 And hoofs behind and hoofs before,
 And flanks with dark runes fretted o'er.
 'Twas bull, 'twas mitred Minotaur,
 A dead disboweled mystery ;
 'The mummy of a buried faith
 Stark from the charnel without scathe,
 Its wings stood for the light to bathe,—
 Such fossil cerements as might swathe
 The very corpse of Nineveh.

The print of its first rush-wrapping,
 Wound ere it dried, still ribbed the thing.
 What song did the brown maidens sing,
 From purple mouths alternating,
 When that was woven languidly ?
 What vows, what rites, what prayers preferr'd,
 What songs has the strange image heard ?
 In what blind vigil stood interr'd
 For ages, till an English word
 Broke silence first at Nineveh ?

Oh when upon each sculptured court,
 Where even the wind might not resort,—
 O'er which Time passed, of like import
 With the wild Arab boys at sport,—
 A living face looked in to see :—

Oh seemed it not — the spell once broke —
 As though the carven warriors woke,
 As though the shaft the string forsook,
 The cymbals clashed, the chariots shook,
 And there was life in Nineveh?

On London stones our sun anew
 The beast's recovered shadow threw.
 (No shade that plague of darkness knew,
 No light, no shade, while older grew
 By ages the old earth and sea.)
 Lo thou! could all thy priests have shown
 Such proof to make thy godhead known?
 From their dead Past thou liv'st alone;
 And still thy shadow is thine own
 Even as of yore in Nineveh.

That day whereof we keep record,
 When near thy city-gates the Lord
 Sheltered his Jonah with a gourd,
 This sun, (I said) here present, pour'd
 Even thus this shadow that I see.
 This shadow has been shed the same
 From sun and moon,— from lamps which came
 For prayer,— from fifteen days of flame,
 The last, while smoldered to a name
 Sardanapalus' Nineveh.

Within thy shadow, haply, once
 Sennacherib has knelt, whose sons
 Smote him between the altar-stones:
 Or pale Semiramis her zones
 Of gold, her incense brought to thee,
 In love for grace, in war for aid:
 Ay, and who else? till 'neath thy shade
 Within his trenches newly made
 Last year the Christian knelt and pray'd —
 Not to thy strength — in Nineveh.*

* During the excavations, the Tiyari workmen held their services in the shadow of the great bulls. (*Layard's "Nineveh"* ch ix.)

Now, thou poor god, within this hall
Where the blank windows blind the wall
From pedestal to pedestal,
The kind of light shall on thee fall
Which London takes the day to be :
While school-foundations in the act
Of holiday, three files compact,
Shall learn to view thee as a fact
Connected with that zealous tract :
“Rome,—Babylon and Nineveh.”

Deemed they of this, those worshippers,
When, in some mythic chain of verse
Which man shall not again rehearse,
The faces of thy ministers
Yearned pale with bitter ecstacy ?
Greece, Egypt, Rome,—did any god
Before whose feet men knelt unshod
Deem that in this unblest abode
Another scarce more unknown god
Should house with him, from Nineveh ?

Ah ! in what quarries lay the stone
From which this pigmy pile has grown
Unto man's need how long unknown,
Since thy vast temples, court and cone,
Rose far in desert history ?
Ah ! what is here that does not lie
All strange to thine awakened eye ?
Ah ! what is here can testify
(Save that dumb presence of the sky)
Unto thy day and Nineveh ?

Why, of those mummies in the room
Above, there might indeed have come
One out of Egypt to thy home,
An alien. Nay, but were not some
Of these thine own “antiquity ?”

And now,— they and their gods and thou
 All relics here together,— now
 Whose profit ? whether bull or cow,
 Isis or Ibis, who or how,
 Whether of Thebes or Nineveh ?

The consecrated metals found,
 And ivory tablets, underground,
 Winged teraphim and creatures crown'd
 When air and daylight filled the mound,
 Fell into dust immediately.
 And even as these, the images
 Of awe and worship,— even as these,—
 So, smitten with the sun's increase,
 Her glory moldered and did cease
 From immemorial Nineveh.

The day her builders made their halt,
 Those cities of the lake of salt
 Stood firmly 'stablished without fault,
 Made proud with pillars of basalt,
 With sardonyx and porphyry.
 The day that Jonah bore abroad
 To Nineveh the voice of God,
 A brackish lake lay in his road,
 Where erst Pride fixed her sure abode,
 As then in royal Nineveh.

The day when he, Pride's lord and Man's,
 Showed all the kingdoms at a glance
 To Him before whose countenance
 The years recede, the years advance,
 And said, Fall down and worship me :—
 Mid all the pomp beneath that look,
 Then stirred there, haply, some rebuke,
 Where to the wind the salt pools shook,
 And in those tracts, of life forsook,
 That knew thee not, O Nineveh.

Delicate harlot ! On thy throne
 Thou with a world beneath thee prone

In state for ages sat'st alone ;
 And needs were years and lusters flown
 Ere strength of man could vanquish thee
 Whom even thy victor foes must bring,
 Still royal, among maids that sing
 As with doves' voices, taboring
 Upon their breasts, unto the King,
 A kingly conquest, Nineveh !

... Here woke my thought. The wind's slow sway
 Had waxed ; and like the human play
 Of scorn that smiling spreads away,
 The sunshine shivered off the day :
 The callous wind, it seemed to me,
 Swept up the shadow from the ground :
 And pale as whom the Fates astound,
 The god forlorn stood winged and crown'd :
 Within I knew the cry lay bound
 Of the dumb soul of Nineveh.

And as I turned, my sense half shut
 Still saw the crowds of kerb and rut
 Go past as marshaled to the strut
 Of ranks in gypsum quaintly cut.
 It seemed in one same pageantry
 They followed forms which had been erst ;
 To pass, till on my sight should burst
 That future of the best or worst
 When some may question which was first,
 Of London or of Nineveh.

For as that Bull-god once did stand
 And watched the burial-clouds of sand,
 Till these at last without a hand
 Rose o'er his eyes, another land,
 And blinded him with destiny : —
 So may he stand again ; till now,
 In ships of unknown sail and prow,
 Some tribe of the Australian plow

Bear him afar,— a relic now
Of London, not of Nineveh

Or it may chance indeed that when
Man's age is hoary among men,—
His centuries threescore and ten,—
His furthest childhood shall seem then
More clear than later times may be :
Who, finding in this desert place
This form, shall hold us for some race
That walked not in Christ's lowly ways,
But bowed its pride and vowed its praise
Unto the god of Nineveh.

The smile rose first,— anon drew nigh
The thought : . . . Those heavy wings spread high
So sure of flight, which do not fly ;
That set gaze never on the sky ;
Those scripted flanks it cannot see ;
Its crown, a brow-contracting load ;
Its planted feet which trust the sod : . . .
(So grew the image as I trod :)
O Nineveh, was this thy God,—
Thine also, mighty Nineveh ?

EDEN BOWER.

It was Lilith the wife of Adam :
 (Eden bower's in flower.)
Not a drop of her blood was human,
But she was made like a soft sweet woman.

Lilith stood on the skirts of Eden ;
 (And O the bower and the hour!)
She was the first that thence was driven ;
With her was hell and with Eve was heaven.

In the ear of the Snake said Lilith :—

(Eden bower's in flower.)

“To thee I come when the rest is over ;
A snake was I when thou wast my lover.

“I was the fairest snake in Eden :

(And O the bower and the hour !)

By the earth's will, new form and feature
Made me a wife for the earth's new creature.

“Take me thou as I come from Adam :

(Eden bower's in flower.)

Once again shall my love subdue thee ;
The past is past and I am come to thee.

“O but Adam was thrall to Lilith !

(And O the bower and the hour !)

All the threads of my hair are golden,
And there in a net his heart was holden.

“O and Lilith was queen of Adam !

(Eden bower's in flower.)

All the day and the night together
My breath could shake his soul like a feather.

‘What great joys had Adam and Lilith !—

(And O the bower and the hour !)

Sweet close rings of the serpent's twining,
As heart in heart lay sighing and pining.

“What bright babes had Lilith and Adam !—

(Eden bower's in flower.)

Shapes that coiled in the woods and waters,
Glittering sons and radiant daughters.

“O thou god, the Lord God of Eden !

(And O the bower and the hour !)

Say, was this fair body for no man,
That of Adam's flesh thou mak'st him a woman ?

“O thou Snake, the King-snake of Eden !

(Eden bower's in flower.)

God's strong will our necks are under,
But thou and I may cleave it in sunder.

“Help, sweet Snake, sweet lover of Lilith !

(And O the bower and the hour !)

And let God learn how I loved and hated
Man in the image of God created.

“Help me once against Eve and Adam !

(Eden bower's in flower.)

Help me once for this one endeavor,
And then my love shall be thine for ever !

“Strong is God, the fell foe of Lilith :

(And O the bower and the hour !)

Naught in heaven or earth may affright him ;
But join thou with me and we will smite him.

“Strong is God, the great God of Eden :

(Eden bower's in flower.)

Over all He made He hath power ;
But lend me thou thy shape for an hour !

“Lend thy shape for the love of Lilith !

(And O the bower and the hour !)

Look, my mouth and my cheek are ruddy,
And thou art cold, and fire is my body.

“Lend thy shape for the hate of Adam !

(Eden bower's in flower.)

That he may wail my joy that forsook him,
And curse the day when the bride-sleep took him.

“Lend thy shape for the shame of Eden !

(And O the bower and the hour !)

Is not the foe-God weak as the foeman
When love grows hate in the heart of a woman ?

“Would’st thou know the heart’s hope of Lilith?
(*Eden bower’s in flower.*)
Then bring thou close thine head till it glisten
Along my breast, and lip me and listen.

“Am I sweet, O sweet Snake of Eden;
(*And O the bower and the hour!*)
Then ope thine ear to my warm mouth’s cooing
And learn what deed remains for our doing.

“Thou didst hear when God said to Adam:—
(*Eden bower’s in flower.*)
“Of all this wealth I have made thee warden;
Thou’rt free to eat of the trees of the garden:

“‘Only of one tree eat not in Eden;
(*And O the bower and the hour!*)
All save one I give to thy free will,—
The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.’

“O my love, come nearer to Lilith!
(*Eden bower’s in flower.*)
In thy sweet folds bind me and bend me,
And let me feel the shape thou shalt lend me!

“In thy shape I’ll go back to Eden;
(*And O the bower and the hour!*)
In these coils that Tree will I grapple,
And stretch this crowned head forth by the apple.

“Lo, Eve bends to the breath of Lilith!
(*Eden bower’s in flower.*)
O how then shall my heart desire
All her blood as food to its fire!

“Lo, Eve bends to the words of Lilith!—
(*And O the bower and the hour!*)
‘Nay, this Tree’s fruit,—why should ye hate it,
Or Death be born the day that ye ate it?’

“O bright Snake, the Death-worm of Adam !

(Eden bower's in flower.)

Wreath thy neck with my hair's bright tether,
And wear my gold and thy gold together !

“On that day on the skirts of Eden,

(And O the bower and the hour !)

In thy shape shall I glide back to thee,
And in my shape for an instant view thee.

“But when thou'rt thou and Lilith is Lilith,

(Eden bower's in flower.)

In what bliss past hearing or seeing
Shall each one drink of the other's being !

“With cries of ‘Eve !’ and ‘Eden !’ and ‘Adam !’

(And O the bower and the hour !)

How shall we mingle our love's caresses,
I in thy coils, and thou in my tresses !

“With those names, ye echoes of Eden,

(Eden bower's in flower.)

Fire shall cry from my heart that burneth,—
‘Dust he is and to dust returneth !’

“Yet to-day, thou master of Lilith,—

(And O the bower and the hour !)

Wrap me round in the form I'll borrow
And let me tell thee of sweet to-morrow.

“In the planted garden eastward in Eden,

(Eden bower's in flower.)

Where the river goes forth to water the garden,
The springs shall dry and the soil shall harden.

“Yea, where the bride-sleep fell upon Adam,

(And O the bower and the hour !)

None shall hear when the storm-wind whistles
Through roses choked among thorns and thistles.

AVE.

Mother of the fair Delight,
 Thou handmaid perfect in God's sight,
 Now sitting forth beside the three,
 Thyself a woman-Trinity,—
 Being a daughter borne to God,
 Mother of Christ from stall to rood,
 And wife unto the Holy Ghost :—
 Oh when our need is uttermost,
 Think that to such as death may strike
 Thou once wert sister sisterlike !
 Thou headstone of humanity,
 Groundstone of the great Mystery,
 Fashioned like us, yet more than we !

Mind'st thou not (when June's heavy breath
 Warmed the long days in Nazareth,) **W**
 That eve thou didst go forth to give
 Thy flowers some drink that they might live **l**
 One faint night more amid the sands ?
 Far off the trees were as pale wands
 Against the fervid sky : the sea
 Sighed further off eternally
 As human sorrow sighs in sleep.
 Then suddenly the awe grew deep,
 As of a day to which all days
 Were footsteps in God's secret ways .
 Until a folding sense, like prayer,
 Which is, as God is, everywhere,
 Gathered about thee ; and a voice
 Spake to thee without any noise,
 Being of the silence :—"Hail," it said,
 "Thou that art highly favorèd ;
 The Lord is with thee here and now ;
 Blessed among all women thou."

Ah ! knew'st thou of the end, when first
 That Babe was on thy bosom nurs'd ?—

Or when He tottered round thy knee
 Did thy great sorrow dawn on thee? —
 And through His boyhood, year by year
 Eating with him the passover,
 Didst thou discern confusedly
 That holier sacrament, when he,
 The bitter cup about to quaff,
 Should break the bread and eat thereof? —
 Or came not yet the knowledge, even
 Till on some day forecast in Heaven
 His feet passed through thy door to press
 Upon His Father's business? —
 Or still was God's high secret kept?

Nay, but I think the whisper crept
 Like growth through childhood. Work and play.
 Things common to the course of day,
 Awed thee with meanings unfulfill'd;
 And all through girlhood, something still'd
 Thy senses like the birth of light,
 When thou hast trimmed thy lamp at night
 Or washed thy garments in the stream;
 To whose white bed had come the dream
 That He was thine and thou wast His
 Who feeds among the field-lilies.
 O solemn shadow of the end
 In that wise spirit long contain'd!
 O awful end! and those unsaid
 Long years when It was Finishèd!

Mind'st thou not (when the twilight gone
 Left darkness in the house of John,
 Between the naked window-bars
 That spacious vigil of the stars? —
 For thou, a watcher even as they,
 Wouldst rise from where throughout the day
 Thou wroughtest raiment for His poor,
 And, finding the fixed terms endure
 Of day and night which never brought
 Sounds of His coming chariot,

Wouldst lift through cloud waste unexplor'd
 Those eyes which said, "How long, O Lord?"
 Then that disciple whom He loved,
 Well heeding, haply would be moved
 To ask thy blessing in His name;
 And that one thought in both, the same
 Though silent, then would clasp ye round
 To weep together,—tears long bound,
 Sick tears of patience, dumb and slow.
 Yet, "Surely I come quickly,"—so
 He said, from life and death gone home.
 Amen: even so, Lord Jesus, come!

But oh! what human tongue can speak
 That day when Michael came * to break
 From the tir'd spirit, like a veil,
 Its covenant with Gabriel
 Endured at length unto the end?
 What human thought can apprehend
 That mystery of motherhood
 When thy Beloved at length renew'd
 The sweet communion severèd,—
 His left hand underneath thine head
 And His right hand embracing thee?—
 Lo! He was thine, and this is He!

Soul, is it Faith, or Love, or Hope,
 That lets me see her standing up
 Where the light of the Throne is bright?
 Unto the left, unto the right,
 The cherubim, arrayed, conjoint,
 Float inward to a golden point,
 And from between the seraphim
 The glory issues for a hymn.
 O Mary Mother, be not loth
 To listen,—thou whom the stars clothe,
 Who seest and mayst not be seen!
 Hear us at last, O Mary Queen!

* A Church legend of the Blessed Virgin's death.

Into our shadow bend thy face,
 Bowing thee from the secret place,
 O Mary Virgin, full of grace !

THE STAFF AND SCRIP.

“Who rules these lands ?” the Pilgrim said.

“Stranger, Queen Blanchelys.”

“And who has thus harried them ?” he said.

“It was Duke Luke did this :

God’s ban be his !”

The Pilgrim said : “Where is your house ?

I’ll rest there, with your will.”

“You’ve but to climb these blackened boughs

And you’ll see it over the hill,

For it burns still.”

“Which road, to seek your Queen ?” said he.

“Nay, nay, but with some wound

You’ll fly back hither, it may be,

And by your blood i’ the ground

My place be found.”

“Friend, stay in peace. God keep your head,

And mine, where I will go ;

For He is here and there,” he said.

He passed the hill-side, slow,

And stood below.

The Queen sat idle by her loom :

She heard the arras stir,

And looked up sadly : through the room

The sweetness sickened her

Of musk and myrrh.

Her women, standing two and two,
In silence combed the fleece.
The pilgrim said, "Peace be with you,
Lady;" and bent his knees.
She answered, "Peace."

Her eyes were like the wave within;
Like water-reeds the poise
Of her soft body, dainty thin;
And like the water's noise
Her plaintive voice.

For him, the stream had never well'd
In desert tracts malign
So sweet; nor had he ever felt
So faint in the sunshine
Of Palestine.

Right so, he knew that he saw weep
Each night through every dream
The Queen's own face, confused in sleep
With visages supreme
Not known to him.

"Lady," he said, "your lands lie burnt
And waste: to meet your foe
All fear: this I have seen and learnt.
Say that it shall be so,
And I will go."

She gazed at him. "Your cause is just,
For I have heard the same:"
He said: "God's strength shall be my trust.
Fall it to good or grame,
'Tis in His name."

"Sir, you are thanked. My cause is dead;
Why should you toil to break
A grave, and fall therein?" she said
He did not pause but spake:
"For my vow's sake."

"Can such vows be, Sir — to God's ear,
Not to God's will?" "My vow
Remains : God heard me there as here."
He said with reverent brow,
"Both then and now."

They gazed together, he and she,
The minute while he spoke ;
And when he ceased, she suddenly
Looked round upon her folk
As though she woke.

"Fight, Sir," she said : "my prayers in pain
Shall be your fellowship."
He whispered one among her train,—
"To-morrow bid her keep
This staff and scrip."

She sent him a sharp sword, whose belt
About his body there
As sweet as her own arms he felt.
He kissed its blade, all bare,
Instead of her.

She sent him a green banner wrought
With one white lily stem,
To find his lance with when he fought.
He writ upon the same
And kissed her name.

She sent him a white shield, whereon
She bade that he should trace
His will. He blent fair hues that shone,
And in a golden space
He kissed her face.

Born of the day that died, that eve
Now dying sank to rest ;
As he, in likewise taking leave,
Once with a heaving breast
Looked to the west.

And there the sunset skies unseal'd
Like lands he never knew,
Beyond to-morrow's battle-field
Lay open out of view
To ride into.

Next day till dark the women pray'd
Nor any might know there
How the fight went : the Queen has bade
That there do come to her
No messenger.

The Queen is pale, her maidens ail ;
And to the organ-tones
They sing but faintly, who sang well
The matin-orisons,
The lauds and nones.

Lo, Father, is thine ear inclin'd,
And hath thine angel pass'd ?
For these thy watchers now are blind
With vigil, and at last
Dizzy with fast.

Weak now to them the voice o' the priest
As any trance affords ;
And when each anthem failed and ceas'd,
It seemed that the last chords
Still sang the words.

"Oh what is the light that shines so red ?
'Tis long since the sun set ;"
Quoth the youngest to the eldest maid :
"'Twas dim but now, and yet
The light is great."

Quoth the other : "'Tis our sight is dazed
That we see flame i' the air."
But the Queen held her brows and gazed,
And said, "It is the glare
Of torches there."

“Oh what are the sounds that rise and spread?
 All day it was so still;”
 Quoth the youngest to the eldest maid:
 “Unto the furthest hill
 The air they fill.”

Quoth the other: “’Tis our sense is blurr’d
 With all the chants gone by.”
 But the Queen held her breath and heard,
 And said, “It is the cry
 Of Victory.”

The first of all the rout was sound,
 The next were dust and flame,
 And then the horses shook the ground:
 And in the thick of them
 A still band came.

“Oh what do ye bring out of the fight,
 Thus hid beneath these boughs?”
 “Thy conquering guest returns to-night,
 And yet shall not carouse,
 Queen, in thy house.”

“Uncover ye his face,” she said.
 “O changed in little space!”
 She cried, “O pale that was so red
 O God, O God of grace!
 Cover his face.”

His sword was broken in his hand
 Where he had kissed the blade.
 “O soft steel that could not withstand!
 O my hard heart unstayed,
 That prayed and prayed!”

His bloodied banner crossed his mouth
 Where he had kissed her name.
 “O east, and west, and north, and south,
 Fair flew my web, for shame,
 To guide Death’s aim!”

The tints were shredded from his shield
Where he had kissed her face.

“Oh, of all gifts that I could yield,
Death only keeps its place,
My gift and grace !”

Then stepped a damsel to her side,
And spoke, and needs must weep :
“For his sake, lady, if he died,
He prayed of thee to keep
This staff and scrip.”

That night they hung above her bed,
Till morning wet with tears.
Year after year above her head
Her bed his token wears,
Five years, ten years.

That night the passion of her grief
Shook them as there they hung.
Each year the wind that shed the leaf
Shook them and in its tongue
A message flung.

And once she woke with a clear mind
That letters writ to calm
Her soul lay in the scrip ; to find
Only a torpid balm
And dust of palm.

They shook far off with palace sport
When joust and dance were rife ;
And the hunt shook them from the court ;
For hers, in peace or strife,
Was a Queen's life.

A Queen's death now : as now they shake
To gusts in chapel dim,—
Hung where she sleeps, not seen to wake
(Carved lovely white and slim),
With them by him.

Stand up to-day, still armed, with **her**,
 Good knight, before His brow
 Who then as now was here and there,
 Who had in mind thy vow
 Then even as now.

The lists are set in Heaven to-day,
 The bright pavilions shine ;
 Fair hangs thy shield, and none gainsay ;
 The trumpets sound in sign
 That **she** is thine.

Not tithed with days' and years' decease
 He pays thy wage He owed,
 But with imperishable peace
 Here in His own abode,
 Thy jealous God.



A LAST CONFESSION.

(*Regno Lombardo-Veneto*, 1848.)

* * * * *

OUR Lombard country-girls along the coast
 Wear daggers in their garters ; for they know
 That they might hate another girl to death
 Or meet a German lover. Such a knife
 I bought her, with a hilt of horn and pearl.

Father, you cannot know of all my thoughts
 That day in going to meet her,—that last day
 For the last time, she said ;—of all the love
 And all the hopeless hope that she might change
 And go back with me. Ah ! and everywhere,
 At places we both knew along the road,
 Some fresh shape of herself as once she was

Grew present at my side ; until it seemed —
 So close they gathered round me — they would all
 Be with me when I reached the spot at last,
 To plead my cause with her against herself
 So changed. O Father, if you knew all this
 You cannot know, then you would know too, Father,
 And only then, if God can pardon me.
 What can be told I'll tell, if you will hear

I passed a village-fair upon my road,
 And thought, being empty-handed, I would take
 Some little present : such might prove, I said,
 Either a pledge between us, or (God help me !)
 A parting gift. And there it was I bought
 The knife I spoke of, such as women wear.

That day, some three hours afterwards, I found
 For certain, it must be a parting gift.
 And, standing silent now at last, I looked
 Into her scornful face ; and heard the sea
 Still trying hard to din into my ears
 Some speech it knew which still might change her
 heart
 If only it could make me understand.
 One moment thus. Another, and her face
 Seemed further off than the last line of sea,
 So that I thought, if now she were to speak
 I could not hear her. Then again I knew
 All, as we stood together on the sand
 At Iglio, in the first thin shade o' the hills.

"Take it," I said, and held it out to her,
 While the hilt glanced within my trembling hold ;
 "Take it and keep it for my sake," I said.
 Her neck unbent not, neither did her eyes
 Move, nor her foot left beating of the sand ;
 Only she put it by from her and laughed.

Father, you hear my speech and not her laugh ;
 But God heard that. Will God remember all ?

It was another laugh than the sweet sound
Which rose from her sweet childish heart, that day
Eleven years before, when first I found her
Alone upon the hill-side ; and her curls
Shook down in the warm grass as she looked up
Out of her curls in my eyes bent to hers.
She might have served a painter to portray
That heavenly child which in the latter days
Shall walk between the lion and the lamb.
I had been for nights in hiding, worn and sick
And hardly fed ; and so her words at first
Seemed fitful like the talking of the trees
And voices in the air that knew my name.
And I remember that I sat me down
Upon the slope with her, and thought the world
Must be all over or had never been,
We seemed there so alone. And soon she told me
Her parents both were gone away from her.
I thought perhaps she meant that they had died ;
But when I asked her this, she looked again
Into my face, and said that yestereve
They kissed her long, and wept and made her weep,
And gave her all the bread they had with them,
And then had gone together up the hill
Where we were sitting now, and had walked on
Into the great red light ; “and so,” she said,
“I have come up here too ; and when this evening
They step out of the light as they stepped in,
I shall be here to kiss them.” And she laughed.

Then I bethought me suddenly of the famine ;
And how the church-steps throughout all the town,
When last I had been there a month ago,
Swarmed with starved folk ; and how the bread was
weighed
By Austrians armed ; and women that I knew
For wives and mothers walked the public street,
Saying aloud that if their husbands feared
To snatch the children's food, themselves would stay
Till they had earned it there, So then this child

Was piteous to me ; for all told me then
 Her parents must have left her to God's chance,
 To man's or to the Church's charity,
 Because of the great famine, rather than
 To watch her growing thin between their knees.
 With that, God took my mother's voice and spoke,
 And sights and sounds came back and things long
 since,
 And all my childhood found me on the hills ;
 And so I took her with me.

I was young,

Scarce man then, Father ; but the cause which gave
 The wounds I die of now had brought me then
 Some wounds already ; and I lived alone,
 As any hiding hunted man must live.
 It was no easy thing to keep a child
 In safety ; for herself it was not safe,
 And doubled my own danger ; but I knew
 That God would help me.

Yet a little while

Pardon me, Father, if I pause. I think
 I have been speaking to you of some matters
 There was no need to speak of, have I not ?
 You do not know how clearly those things stood
 Within my mind, which I have spoken of,
 Nor how they strove for utterance. Life all past
 Is like the sky when the sun sets in it,
 Clearest where furthest off.

I told you how

She scorned my parting gift and laughed. And yet
 A woman's laugh's another thing sometimes ;
 I think they laugh in Heaven. I know last night
 I dreamed I saw into the garden of God,
 Where women walked whose painted images
 I have seen with candles round them in the church.
 They bent this way and that, one to another,
 Playing : and over the long golden hair
 Of each there floated like a ring of fire

Which when she stooped stooped with her, and when
 she rose
Rose with her. Then a breeze flew in among them,
As if a window had been opened in heaven
For God to give his blessing from, before
This world of ours should set ; (for in my dream
I thought our world was setting, and the sun
Flared, a spent taper ;) and beneath that gust
The rings of light quivered like forest-leaves.
Then all the blessed maidens who were there
Stood up together, as it were a voice
That called them ; and they threw their tresses back,
And smote their palms, and all laughed up at once,
For the strong heavenly joy they had in them
To hear God bless the world. Wherewith I woke :
And looking round, I saw as usual
That she was standing there with her long locks
Pressed to her side ; and her laugh ended theirs.

For always when I see her now, she laughs.
And yet her childish laughter haunts me too,
The life of this dead terror ; as in days
When she, a child, dwelt with me. I must tell
Something of those days yet before the end.

I brought her from the city — one such day
When she was still a merry, loving child,—
The earliest gift I mind my giving her ;
A little image of a flying Love
Made of our colored glass-ware, in his hands
A dart of gilded metal and a torch.
And him she kissed and me, and fain would know
Why were his poor eyes blindfold, why the wings
And why the arrow. What I knew I told
Of Venus and of Cupid,— strange old tales.
And when she heard that he could rule the loves
Of men and women, still she shook her head
And wondered ; and, “Nay, nay,” she murmured still,
“So strong, and he a younger child than I !”
And then she'd have me fix him on the wall

Fronting her little bed ; and then again
 She needs must fix him there herself, *because*
 I gave him to her and she loved him so,
 And he should make her love me better yet,
 If women loved the more, the more they grew.
 But the fit place upon the wall was high
 For her, and so I held her in my arms :
 And each time that the heavy pruning-hook
 I gave her for a hammer slipped away
 As it would often, still she laughed and laughed
 And kissed and kissed me. But amid her mirth,
 Just as she hung the image on the nail,
 It slipped and all its fragments strewed the ground :
 And as it fell she screamed, for in her hand
 The dart had entered deeply and drawn blood.
 And so her laughter turned to tears : and " Oh !"
 I said, the while I bandaged the small hand,—
 " That I should be the first to make you bleed,
 Who love and love and love you ! " — kissing still
 The fingers till I got her safe to bed.
 And still she sobbed,— " not for the pain at all,"
 She said, " but for the Love, the poor good Love
 You gave me." So she cried herself to sleep.

Another later thing comes back to me.
 'Twas in those hardest foulest days of all,
 When still from his shut palace, sitting clean
 Above the splash of blood, old Metternich
 (May his soul die, and never-dying worms
 Feast on its pain for ever !) used to thin
 His year's doomed hundreds daintily, each month
 Thirties and fifties. This time, as I think,
 Was when his thrift forbade the poor to take
 That evil brackish salt which the dry rocks
 Keep all through winter when the sea draws in.
 The first I heard of it was a chance shot
 In the street here and there, and on the stones
 A stumbling clatter as of horse hemmed round.
 Then, when she saw me hurry out of doors,
 My gun slung at my shoulder and my knife

Stuck in my girdle, she smoothed down my hair
And laughed to see me look so brave, and leaped
Up to my neck and kissed me. She was still
A child ; and yet that kiss was on my lips
So hot all day where the smoke shut us in.

For now, being always with her, the first love
I had — the father's, brother's love — was changed,
I think, in somewise ; like a holy thought
Which is a prayer before one knows of it.
The first time I perceived this, I remember,
Was once when after hunting I came home
Weary, and she brought food and fruit for me,
And sat down at my feet upon the floor
Leaning against my side. But when I felt
Her sweet head reach from that low seat of hers
So high as to be laid upon my heart,
I turned and looked upon my darling there
And marked for the first time how tall she was ;
And my heart beat with so much violence
Under her cheek, I thought she could not choose
But wonder at it soon and ask me why ;
And so I bade her rise and eat with me.
And when, remembering all and counting back
The time, I made out fourteen years for her
And told her so, she gazed at me with eyes
As of the sky and sea on a gray day,
And drew her long hands through her hair, and asked
me
If she was not a woman ; and then laughed :
And as she stooped in laughing, I could see
Beneath the growing throat the breasts half globed
Like folded lilies deepset in the stream.

Yes, let me think of her as then ; for so
Her image, Father, is not like the sights
Which come when you are gone. She had a mouth
Made to bring death to life,— the underlip
Sucked in, as if it strove to kiss itself.
Her face was ever pale, as when one stoops

Over wan water ; and the dark crisped hair
 And the hair's shadow made it paler still :—
 Deep-serried locks, the darkness of the cloud
 Where the moon's gaze is set in eddying gloom.
 Her body bore her neck as the tree's stem
 Bears the top branch ; and as the branch sustains
 The flower of the year's pride, her high neck bore
 That face made wonderful with night and day.
 Her voice was swift, yet ever the last words
 Fell lingeringly ; and rounded finger-tips
 She had, that clung a little where they touched
 And then were gone o' the instant. Her great eyes,
 That sometimes turned half dizzily beneath
 The passionate lids, as faint, when she would speak,
 Had also in them hidden springs of mirth,
 Which under the dark lashes evermore
 Shook to her laugh, as when a bird flies low
 Between the water and the willow-leaves,
 And the shade quivers till he wins the light.

I was a moody comrade to her then,
 For all the love I bore her. Italy,
 The weeping desolate mother, long has claimed
 Her son's strong arms to lean on, and their hands
 To lop the poisonous thicket from her path,
 Cleaving her way to light. And from her need
 Had grown the fashion of my whole poor life
 Which I was proud to yield her, as my father
 Had yielded his. And this had come to be
 A game to play, a love to clasp, a hate
 To wreak, all things together that a man
 Needs for his blood to ripen : till at times
 All else seemed shadows, and I wondered still
 To see such life pass muster and be deemed
 Time's bodily substance. In those hours, no doubt,
 To the young girl my eyes were like my soul,—
 Dark wells of death-in-life that yearned for day.
 And though she ruled me always, I remember
 That once when I was thus and she still kept
 Leaping about the place and laughing, I

Did almost chide her ; whereupon she knelt
 And putting her two hands into my breast
 Sang me a song. Are these tears in my eyes ?
 'Tis long since I have wept for anything.
 I thought that song forgotten out of mind,
 And now, just as I spoke it, it came
 All back. It is but a rude thing, ill rhymed,
 Such as a blind man chaunts and his dog hears
 Holding the platter, when the children run
 To merrier sport and leave him. Thus it goes :—

*La bella donna **
Piangendo disse:
"Come son fisse
Le stelle in cielo !
Quel fiato anelo
Dello stanco sole,
Quanto m' assonna !
E la luna, macchiata

* She wept, sweet lady,
 And said in weeping:
 "What spell is keeping
 The stars so steady ?
 Why does the power
 Of the sun's noon-hour
 To sleep so move me ?
 And the moon in heaven,
 Stained where she passes
 As a worn-out glass is,—
 Wearily driven,
 Why walks she above me ?

"Stars, moon, and sun too,
 I'm tired of either
 And all together !
 Whom speak they unto
 That I should listen ?
 For very surely,
 Though my arms and shoulders
 Dazzle beholders,
 And my eyes glisten,
 All's nothing purely !
 What are words said for
 At all about them,
 If he they are made for
 Can do without them ? "

She laughed, sweet lady,
 And said in laughing:
 "His hand clings half in

My own already !
 Oh ! do you love me ?
 Oh ! speak of passion
 In no new fashion,
 No loud inveighings,
 But the old sayings
 You once said of me.

"You said : 'As summer,
 Through boughs grown brittle
 Comes back a little
 Ere frosts benumb her,—
 So bring'st thou to me
 All leaves and flowers,
 Though autumn's gloomy
 To-day in the bowers.'

"Oh ! does he love me,
 When my voice teaches
 The very speeches
 He then spoke of me ?
 Alas ! what flavor
 Still with me lingers ? "
 [But she laughed as my kisses
 Glowed in her fingers
 With love's old blisses.]
 "Oh ! what one favor
 Remains to woo him,
 Whose whole poor savor
 Belongs not to him."

**Come uno specchio
Logoro e vecchio, —
Faccia affannata,
Che cosa vuole ?**

**“ Chè stelle, luna, e sole,
Ciascun m' annoja
E m' annojano insieme ;
Non me ne preme
Nè ci prendo gioja.
E veramente,
Che le spalle sien franche
E la braccia bianche
E il seno caldo e tondo.
Non mi fa niente.
Chè cosa al mondo
Posso più far di questi**

Se non piacciono a te, come dicesti

**La donna rise
E riprese ridendo: —
“ Questa mano che prendo
E dunque mia ?
Tu m' ami dunque ?
Dimmelo ancora,
Non in modo qualunque,
Me la parole
Belle e precise
Che dicesti pria.**

**“ Siccome suole
La state talora
(Dicesti) un qualche istante
Tornare innanzi inverno,
Così tu fai ch' io scerno
Le foglie tutte quante,
Ben ch' io certo tenessi
Per passato l' autunno.**

**“ Eccolo il mio alunno !
Io debbo insegnargli
Quei cari detti istessi
Ch' ei mi disse una volta !
Oimè ! Che cosa dargli,”
(Ma ridea piano piano
Dei baci in sulla mano.)**

Ch' ei non m' abbia da lungo tempo tolta !

That I should sing upon this bed ! — with you
 To listen, and such words still left to say !
 Yet was it I that sang ? The voice seemed hers,
 As on the very day she sang to me ;
 When, having done, she took out of my hand
 Something that I had played with all the while
 And laid it down beyond my reach ; and so
 Turning my face round till it fronted hers,—
 “ Weeping or laughing, which was best ? ” she said.

But these are foolish tales. How should I show
 The heart that glowed then with love’s heat, each day
 More and more brightly ? — when for long years now
 The very flame that flew about the heart,
 And gave it fiery wings, has come to be
 The lapping blaze of hell’s environment
 Whose tongues all bid the molten heart despair.

Yet one more thing comes back on me to-night
 Which I may tell you : for it bore my soul
 Dread firstlings of the brood that rend it now.
 It chanced that in our last year’s wanderings
 We dwelt at Monza, far away from home,
 If home we had : and in the Duomo there
 I sometimes entered with her when she prayed.
 An image of Our Lady stands there, wrought
 In marble by some great Italian hand
 In the great days when she and Italy
 Sat on one throne together : and to her
 And to none else my loved one told her heart.
 She was a woman then ; and as she knelt,—
 Her sweet brow in the sweet brow’s shadow there,—
 They seemed two kindred forms whereby our land
 (Whose work still serves the world for miracle)
 Made manifest herself in womanhood.
 Father, the day I speak of was the first
 For weeks that I had borne her company
 Into the Duomo ; and those weeks had been
 Much troubled, for then first the glimpses came
 Of some impenetrable restlessness
 Growing in her to make her changed and cold.

And as we entered there that day, I bent
 My eyes on the fair Image, and I said
 Within my heart, "Oh turn her heart to me!"
 And so I left her to her prayers, and went
 To gaze upon the pride of Monza's shrine,
 Where in the sacristy the light still falls
 Upon the Iron Crown of Italy,
 On whose crowned heads the day has closed, nor yet
 The daybreak gilds another head to crown.
 But coming back, I wondered when I saw
 That the sweet lady of her prayers now stood
 Alone without her until further off,
 Before some new Madonna gayly decked,
 Tinselled and gewgawed, a slight German toy,
 I saw her kneel, still praying. At my step
 She rose, and side by side we left the church.
 I was much moved, and sharply questioned her
 Of her transferred devotion; but she seemed
 Stubborn and heedless; till she lightly laughed
 And said: "The old Madonna? Ay indeed,
 She had my old thoughts,—this one has my new."
 Then silent to the soul I held my way:
 And from the fountains of the public place
 Unto the pigeon-haunted pinnacles,
 Bright wings and water winnowed the bright air;
 And stately with her laugh's subsiding smile
 She went, with clear-swayed waist and towering neck
 And hands held light before her; and the face
 Which long had made a day in my life's night
 Was night in day to me; as all men's eyes
 Turned on her beauty, and she seemed to tread
 Beyond my heart to the world made for her.

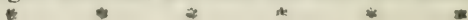
Ah there! my wounds will snatch my sense again:
 The pain comes billowing on like a full cloud
 Of thunder, and the flash that breaks from it
 Leaves my brain burning. That's the wound he gave,
 The Austrian whose white coat I still made match
 With his white face, only the two were red
 As suits his trade. The devil makes them wear

White for a livery, that the blood may show
Braver that brings them to him. So he looks
Sheer o'er the field and knows his own at once.

Give me a draught of water in that cup ;
My voice feels thick ; perhaps you do not hear ;
But you *must* hear. If you mistake my words
And so absolve me, I am sure the blessing
Will burn my soul. If you mistake my words
And so absolve me, Father, the great sin
Is yours, not mine : mark this : your soul shall burn
With mine for it. I have seen pictures where
Souls burned with Latin shriekings in their mouths .
Shall my end be as theirs ? Nay, but I know
'Tis you shall shriek in Latin. Some bell rings,
Rings through my brain : it strikes the hour in hell.

You see I cannot, Father ; I have tried,
But cannot, as you see. These twenty times
Beginning, I have come to the same point
And stopped. Beyond, there are but broken words
Which will not let you understand my tale.
It is that then we have her with us here,
As when she wrung her hair out in my dream
To-night, till all the darkness reeked of it.
Her hair is always wet, for she has kept
Its tresses wrapped about her side for years ;
And when she wrung them round over the floor,
I heard the blood between her fingers hiss ;
So that I sat up in my bed and screamed
Once and again ; and once to once, she laughed.
Look that you turn not now,— she's at your back .
Gather your rope up, Father, and keep close,
Or she'll sit down on it and send you mad.

At Iglio in the first thin shade o' the hills
The sand is black and red. The black was black
When what was spilt that day sank into it,
And the red scarcely darkened. There I stood
This night with her, and saw the sand the same.



What would you have me tell you? Father, father,
How shall I make you know? You have not known
The dreadful soul of woman, who one day
Forgets the old and takes the new to heart,
Forgets what man remembers, and therewith
Forgets the man. Nor can I clearly tell
How the change happened between her and me.
Her eyes looked on me from an emptied heart
When most my heart was full of her; and still
In every corner of myself I sought
To find what service failed her; and no less
Than in the good time past, there all was hers.
What do you love? Your Heaven? Conceive it
spread

For one first year of all eternity
All round you with all joys and gifts of God;
And then when most your soul is blent with it
And all yields song together,— then it stands
O' the sudden like a pool that once gave back
Your image, but now drowns it and is clear
Again,— or like a sun bewitched, that burns
Your shadow from you, and still shines in sight.
How could you bear it? Would you not cry out,
Among those eyes grown blind to you, those ears
That hear no more your voice you hear the same,—
“God! what is left but hell for company,
But hell, hell, hell?” — until the name so breathed
Whirled with hot wind and sucked you down in fire?
Even so I stood the day her empty heart
Left her place empty in our home, while yet
I knew not why she went nor where she went
Nor how to reach her: so I stood the day
When to my prayers at last one sight of her
Was granted, and I looked on heaven made pale
With scorn, and heard heaven mock me in that laugh.

O sweet, long sweet! Was that some ghost of you
Even as your ghost that haunts me now,— twin shapes
Of fear and hatred? May I find you yet
Mine when death wakes? Ah! be it even in flame,

We may have sweetness yet, if you but say
 As once in childish sorrow : "Not my pain,
 My pain was nothing : oh your poor poor love,
 Your broken love !"

My Father, have I not

Yet told you the last things of that last day
 On which I went to meet her by the sea ?
 O God, O God ! but I must tell you all.

Midway upon my journey, when I stopped
 To buy the dagger at the village fair,
 I saw two cursed rats about the place
 I knew for spies — blood-sellers both. That day
 Was not yet over ; for three hours to come
 I prized my life : and so I looked around
 For safety. A poor painted mountebank
 Was playing tricks and shouting in a crowd.
 I knew he must have heard my name, so I
 Pushed past and whispered to him who I was,
 And of my danger. Straight he hustled me
 Into his booth, as it were in the trick,
 And brought me out next minute with my face
 All smeared in patches and a zany's gown ;
 And there I handed him his cups and balls
 And swung the sand-bags round to clear the ring
 For half an hour. The spies came once and looked ;
 And while they stopped, and made all sights and
 sounds

Sharp to my startled senses, I remember
 A woman laughed above me. I looked up
 And saw where a brown-shouldered harlot leaned
 Half through a tavern window thick with vine.
 Some man had come behind her in the room
 And caught her by her arms, and she had turned
 With that coarse empty laugh on him, as now
 He munched her neck with kisses, while the vine
 Crawled in her back.

And three hours afterwards,

When she that I had run all risks to meet

Laughed as I told you, my life burned to death
 Within me, for I thought it like the laugh
 Heard at the fair. She had not left me long ;
 But all she might have changed to, or might change to
 (I know not since — she never speaks a word —)
 Seemed in that laugh. Have I not told you yet,
 Not told you all this time what happened, Father
 When I had offered her the little knife,
 And bade her keep it for my sake that loved her,
 And she had laughed? Have I not told you yet.

“Take it,” I said to her the second time,
 “Take it and keep it.” And then came a fire
 That burnt my hand ; and then the fire was blood,
 And sea and sky were blood and fire, and all
 The day was one red blindness ; till it seemed
 Within the whirling brain’s entanglement
 That she or I or all things bled to death.
 And then I found her lying at my feet
 And knew that I had stabbed her, and saw still
 The look she gave me when she took the knife
 Deep in her heart, even as I bade her then,
 And fell, and her stiff bodice scooped the sand
 Into her bosom.

And she keeps it, see,
 Do you not see she keeps it? — there, beneath
 Wet fingers and wet tresses, in her heart.
 For look you, when she stirs her hand, it shows
 The little hilt of horn and pearl,— even such
 A dagger as our women of the coast
 Twist in their garters.

Father, I have done:
 And from her side now she unwinds the thick
 Dark hair ; all round her side it is wet through,
 But like the sand at Iglio does not change.
 Now you may see the dagger clearly. Father,
 I have told all : tell me at once what hope
 Can reach me still. For now she draws it out

Slowly, and only smiles as yet : look, Father,
 She scarcely smiles : but I shall hear her laugh
 Soon, when she shows the crimson steel to God.

DANTE AT VERONA.

"Yea, thou shalt learn how salt his food who fares
 Upon another's bread,—how steep his path
 Who treadeth up and down another's stairs."
(Div. Com. Parad. xvii.)
 "Behold, even I, even I am Beatrice."
(Div. Com. Parad. xxx.)

OF Florence and of Beatrice
 Servant and singer from of old,
 O'er Dante's heart in youth had toll'd
 The knell that gave his Lady peace ;
 And now in manhood flew the dart
 Wherewith his City pierced his heart.

Yet if his Lady's home above
 Was Heaven, on earth she filled his soul ;
 And if his City held controul
 To cast th' body forth to rove,
 The soul could soar from earth's vain throng,
 And Heaven and Hell fulfill the song.

Follow his feet's appointed way ;—
 But little light we find that clears
 The darkness of the exiled years.
 Follow his spirit's journey :—nay,
 What fires are blent, what winds are blown
 On paths his feet may tread alone ?

Yet of the twofold life he led
 In chainless thought and fettered will
 Some glimpses reach us,—somewhat still
 Of the steep stairs and bitter bread—
 Of the soul's quest whose stern avow
 For years had made him haggard now.

Alas ! the Sacred Song whereto
 Both heaven and earth had set their hand
 Not only at Fame's gate did stand
Knocking to claim the passage through,
 But toiled to ope that heavier door
 Which Florence shut for evermore.

Shall not his birth's baptismal Town
 One last high presage yet fulfill,
 And at that font in Florence still
His forehead take the laurel-crown ?
 O God ! or shall dead souls deny
 The undying souls its prophecy ?

Ay, 'tis their hour. Not yet forgot
 The bitter words he spoke that day
 When for some great charge far away
Her rulers his acceptance sought.
 "And if I go, who stays ?"—so rose
 His scorn : — "And if I stay, who goes ?"

"**Lo !** thou art gone now, and we stay :"
 (The curled lips mutter) : "and no star
 Is from thy mortal path so far
As streets where childhood knew the way.
 To Heaven and Hell thy feet may win,
 But thine own house they come not in."

Therefore, the loftier rose the song
 To touch the secret things of God,
 The deeper pierced the hate that trod
On base men's track who wrought the wrong,
 Till the soul's effluence came to be
 Its own exceeding agony.

Arriving only to depart,
 From court to court, from land to land,
 Like flame within the naked hand
His body bore his burning heart
 That still on Florence strove to bring
 God's fire for a burnt offering.

Even such was Dante's mood, when now,
 Mocked for long years with Fortune's sport,
 He dwelt at yet another court,
 There where Verona's knee did bow
 And her voice hailed with all acclaim
 Can Grande della Scala's name.

As that lord's kingly guest awhile
 His life we follow ; through the days
 Which walked in exile's barren ways,—
 The nights which still beneath one smile
 Heard through all spheres one song increase,—
 "Even I, even I am Beatrice."

At Can La Scala's court, no doubt,
 Due reverence did his steps attend ;
 The ushers on his path would bend
 At ingoing as at going out ;
 The penmen waited on his call
 At council-board, the grooms in hall.

And pages hushed their laughter down,
 And gay squires stilled the merry stir,
 When he passed up the dais-chamber
 With set brows lordlier than a frown ;
 And tire-maids hidden among these
 Drew close their loosened bodices.

Perhaps the priests, (exact to span
 All God's circumference,) if at whiles
 They found him wandering in their aisles,
 Grudged ghostly greeting to the man
 By whom, though not of ghostly guild,
 With Heaven and Hell men's hearts were fill'd

And the court-poets (he, forsooth,
 A whole world's poet strayed to court !)
 Had for his scorn their hate's retort.
 He'd meet them flushed with easy youth,
 Hot on their errands. Like noon-flies
 They vexed him in his ears and eyes.

But at this court, peace still must wrench
Her chaplet from the teeth of war :
By day they held high watch afar,
At night they cried across the trench ;
And still, in Dante's path, the fierce
Gaunt soldiers wrangled o'er their spears.

But vain seemed all the strength to him,
As golden convoys sunk at sea
Whose wealth might root out penury :
Because it was not, limb with limb,
Knit like his heart-strings round the wall
Of Florence, that ill pride might fall.

Yet in the tiltyard, when the dust
Cleared from the Sundered press of knights
Ere yet again it swoops and smites
He almost deemed his longing must
Find force to wield that multitude
And hurl that strength the way he would.

How should he move them,—fame and gain
On all hands calling them at strife ?
He still might find but his one life
To give, by Florence counted vain ;
One heart the false hearts made her doubt ;
One voice she heard once and cast out.

Oh ! if his Florence could but come,
A lily-scept' red damsel fair,
As her own Giotto painted her
On many shields and gates at home,—
A lady crowned, at a soft pace
Riding the lists round to the dais :

Till where Can Grande rules the lists,
As young as Truth, as calm as Force,
She draws her rein now, while her horse
Bows at the turn of the white wrists ;
And when each knight within his stall
Gives ear, she speaks and tells them all :

All the foul tale,—truth sworn untrue
 And falsehood's triumph. All the tale ?
 Great God ! and must she not prevail
 To fire them ere they heard it through,—
 And hand achieve ere heart could rest
 That high adventure of her quest ?

How would his Florence lead them forth,
 Her bridle ringing as she went ;
 And at the last within her tent,
 'Neath golden lilies worship-worth,
 How queenly would she bend the while
 And thank the victors with her smile !

Also her lips should turn his way
 And murmur : " O thou tried and true,
 With whom I wept the long years throughb !
 What shall it profit if I say,
 Thee I remember ? Nay, through thee
 All ages shall remember me."

Peace, Dante, peace ! The task is long,
 The time wears short to compass it.
 Within thine heart such hopes may flit
 And find a voice in deathless song :
 But lo ! as children of man's earth,
 Those hopes are dead before their birth.

Fame tells us that Verona's court
 Was a fair place. The feet might still
 Wander for ever at their will
 In many ways of sweet resort ;
 And still in many a heart around
 The Poet's name due honor found.

Watch we his steps. He comes upon
 The women at their palm-playing.
 The conduits round the gardens sing
 And meet in scoops of milk-white stone,
 Where wearied damsels rest and hold
 Their hands in the wet spurt of gold.

One of whom, knowing well that he,
 By some found stern, was mild with them,
 Would run and pluck his garment's hem,
 Saying, "Messer Dante, pardon me,"—
 Praying that they might hear the song
 Which first of all he made, when young.

"Donne che avete" * . . . Thereunto
 Thus would he murmur, having first
 Drawn near the fountain, while she nurs'd
 His hand against her side : a few
 Sweet words, and scarcely those, half said :
 Then turned, and changed, and bowed his head

For then the voice said in his heart,
 "Even I, even I am Beatrice ;"
 And his whole life would yearn to cease
 Till having reached his room, apart
 Beyond vast lengths of palace-floor,
 He drew the arras round his door.

At such times, Dante, thou hast set
 Thy forehead to the painted pane
 Full oft, I know ; and if the rain
 Smote it outside, her fingers met
 Thy brow ; and if the sun fell there,
 Her breath was on thy face and hair.

Then, weeping, I think certainly
 Thou hast beheld, past sight of eyne,—
 Within another room of thine
 Where now thy body may not be
 But where in thought thou still remain'st,—
 A window often wept against :

The window thou, a youth, hast sought,
 Flushed in the limpid eventime,
 Ending with daylight the day's rhyme

* "Donne che avete intelletto d'amore :"—the first canzone of the "*Vita Nuova*."

Of her ; where oftenwhiles her thought
 Held thee — the lamp untrimmed to write
 In joy through the blue lapse of night.

At Can La Scala's court, no doubt,
 Guests seldom wept. It was brave sport,
 No doubt, at Can La Scala's court,
 Within the palace and without ;
 Where music, set to madrigals,
 Loitered all day through groves and halls.

Because Can Grande of his life
 Had not had six-and-twenty years
 As yet. And when the chroniclers
 Tell you of that Vicenza strife
 And of strifes elsewhere,— you must not
 Conceive for church-sooth he had got

Just nothing in his wits but war :
 Though doubtless 't was the young man's joy
 (Grown with his growth from a mere boy,)
 To mark his " Viva Cane ! " scare
 The foe's shut front, till it would reel
 All blind with shaken points of steel.

But there were places — held too sweet
 For eyes that had not the due veil
 Of lashes and clear lids — as well
 In favor as his saddle-seat :
 Breath of low speech he scorned not there
 Nor light cool fingers in his hair.

Yet if the child whom the sire's plan
 Made free of a deep treasure-chest
 Scoffed it with ill-conditioned jest,—
 We may be sure too that the man
 Was not mere thews, nor all content
 With lewdness swathed in sentiment.

So you may read and marvel not
 That such a man as Dante — one

Who, while Can Grande's deeds were done,
Had drawn his robe round him and thought —
Now at the same guest-table far'd
Where keen Uguccio wiped his beard.*

'Through leaves and trellis-work the sun
Left the wine cool within the glass,—
They feasting where no sun could pass :
And when the women, all as one,
Rose up with brightened cheeks to go,
It was a comely thing, we know.

But Dante recked not of the wine ;
Whether the women stayed or went,
His visage held one stern intent :
And when the music had its sign
To breathe upon them for more ease,
Sometimes he turned and bade it cease.

And as he spared not to rebuke
The mirth, so oft in council he
To bitter truth bore testimony:
And when the crafty balance shook
Well poised to make the wrong prevail,
Then Dante's hand would turn the scale.

And if some envoy from afar
Sailed to Verona's sovereign port
For aid or peace, and all the court
Fawned on its lord, "the Mars of war,
Sole arbiter of life and death," —
Be sure that Dante saved his breath.

And Can La Scala marked askance
These things, accepting them for shame
And scorn, till Dante's guestship came
To be a peevish sufferance :
His host sought ways to make his days
Hateful ; and such have many ways.

* Uguccone della Faggiuola, Dante's former protector, was now his fellow-guest at Verona.

There was a Jester, a foul lout
Whom the court loved for graceless arts ;
Sworn scholiast of the bestial parts
Of speech ; a ribald mouth to shout
In Folly's horny tympanum
Such things as make the wise man dumb.

Much loved, him Dante loathed. And so,
One day when Dante felt perplex'd
If any day that could come next
Were worth the waiting for or no,
And mute he sat amid their din,—
Can Grande called the Jester in.

Rank words, with such, are wit's best wealth.
Lords mouthed approval ; ladies kept
Twittering with clustered heads, except
Some few that took their trains by stealth
And went. Can Grande shook his hair
And smote his thighs and laughed i' the air.

Then, facing on his guest, he cried,—
“ Say, Messer Dante, how it is
I get out of a clown like this
More than your wisdom can provide.”
And Dante : “ 'Tis man's ancient whim
That still his like seems good to him.”

Also a tale is told, how once,
At clearing tables after meat,
Piled for a jest at Dante's feet
Were found the dinner's well-picked bones ;
So laid, to please the banquet's lord,
By one who crouched beneath the board.

Then smiled Can Grande to the rest :—
“ Our Dante's tuneful mouth indeed
Lacks not the gift of flesh to feed !”

"Fair host of mine," replied the guest,
 "So many bones you'd not desery
 If so it chanced the *dog* were I." *

But wherefore should we turn the grout
 In a drained cup, or be at strife
 From the worn garment of a life
 To rip the twisted ravel out?
 Good needs expounding; but of ill
 Each hath enough to guess his fill.

They named him Justicer-at-Law:
 Each month to bear the tale in mind
 Of hues a wench might wear unfin'd
 And of the load an ox might draw;
 To cavil in the weight of bread
 And to see purse-thieves gibbeted.

And when his spirit wove the spell
 (From under even to over-noon
 In converse with itself alone,)—
 As high as Heaven, as low as Hell,—
 He would be summoned and must go:
 For had not Gian stabbed Giacomo?

Therefore the bread he had to eat
 Seemed brackish, less like corn than tares;
 And the rush-strown accustomed stairs
 Each day were steeper to his feet;
 And when the night-vigil was done,
 His brows would ache to feel the sun.

Nevertheless, when from his kin
 There came the tidings how at last
 In Florence a decree was pass'd
 Whereby all banished folk might win
 Free pardon, so a fine were paid
 An act of public penance made,—

* "*Messere, voi non redreste tant' ossa se cane io fossi.*" The point of the reproach is difficult to render, depending as it does on the literal meaning of the name *Cane*.

This Dante writ in answer thus,
Words such as these : " That clearly **they**
In Florence must not have to say : —
The man abode aloof from us
Nigh fifteen years, yet lastly skulk'd
Hither to candleshrift and mulct.

" That he was one the Heavens forbid
To traffic in God's justice sold
By market-weight of earthly gold,
Or to bow down over the lid
Of steaming censers, and so be
Made clean of manhood's obloquy.

" That since no gate led, by God's will,
To Florence, but the one whereat
The priests and money-changers sat,
He still would wander ; for that still,
Even through the body's prison-bars,
His soul possessed the sun and stars."

Such were his words. It is indeed
For ever well our singers should
Utter good words and know them good
Not through song only ; with close heed
Lest, having spent for the work's sake
Six days, the man be left to make.

Months o'er Verona, till the feast
Was come for Florence the Free Town :
And at the shrine of Baptist John
The exiles, girt with many a priest
And carrying candles as they went,
Were held to mercy of the saint.

On the high seats in sober state,—
Gold neck-chains range o'er range below
Gold screen-work where the lilies grow,—

The Heads of the Republic sate,
 Marking the humbled face go by
 Each one of his house-enemy.

And as each proscrip̄t rose and stood
 From kneeling in the ashen dust
 On the shrine-steps, some magnate thrust
 A beard into the velvet hood
 Of his front colleague's gown, to see
 The cinders stuck in the bare knee.

Tosinghi passed, Manelli passed,
 Rinucci passed, each in his place
 But not an Alighieri's face
 Went by that day from first to last
 In the Republic's triumph ; nor
 A foot came home to Dante's door.

(RESPUBLICA — a public thing :
 A shameful shameless prostitute,
 Whose lust with one lord may not suit—
 So takes by turns its reveling
 A night with each, till he at morn
 Is stripped and beaten forth forlorn,

And leaves her, cursing her. If she,
 Indeed, have not some spice-draught, hid
 In scent under a silver lid,
 To drench his open throat with — he
 Once hard asleep ; and thrust him not
 At dawn beneath the boards to rot.

Such *this* Republic ! — not the Maid
 He yearned for ; she who yet should stand
 With Heaven's accepted hand in hand,
 Invulnerable and unbetray'd :
 To whom, even as to God, should be
 Obeisance one with Liberty.)

Years filled out their twelve moons, and ceased
 One in another ; and alway
 There were the whole twelve hours each day
 And each night as the years increased ;
 And rising moon and setting sun
 Beheld that Dante's work was done.

What of his work for Florence ? Well
 It was, he knew, and well must be.
 Yet evermore her hate's decree
 Dwelt in his thought intolerable : —
 His body to be burned,* — his soul
 To beat its wings at hope's vain goal.

What of his work for Beatrice ?
 Now well-nigh was the third song writ,—
 The stars a third time sealing it
 With sudden music of pure peace :
 For echoing thrice the threefold song,
 The unnumbered stars the tone prolong. †

Each hour, as then the Vision pass'd,
 He heard the utter harmony
 Of the nine trembling spheres, till she
 Bowed her eyes towards him in the last,
 So that all ended with her eyes,
 Hell, Purgatory, Paradise.

“It is my trust, as the years fall,
 To write more worthily of her
 Who now, being made God's minister,
 Looks on His visage and knows all.”
 Such was the hope that love did blend
 With grief's slow fires, to make an end

* Such was the last sentence passed by Florence against Dante, as a recalcitrant exile.

† “E quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle.” *INFERNO*.

“Puro e disposto a salire alle stelle.” *PURGATORIO*.

“L'amor che muove il sole e l'altre stelle.” *PARADISO*.

Of the "New Life," his youth's dear book .
 Adding thereunto : " In such trust
 I labor, and believe I must
 Accomplish this which my soul took
 In charge, if God, my Lord and hers,
 Leave my life with me a few years."

The trust which he had borne in youth
 Was all at length accomplished. He
 At length had written worthily —
 Yea even of her ; no rhymes uncouth
 'Twixt tongue and tongue ; but by God's aid
 The first words Italy had said.

Ah ! haply now the heavenly guide
 Was not the last form seen by him :
 But there that Beatrice stood slim
 And bowed in passing at his side,
 For whom in youth his heart made moan
 Then when the city sat alone.*

Clearly herself ; the same whom he
 Met, not past girlhood, in the street,
 Low-bosomed and with hidden feet ;
 And then as woman perfectly,
 In years that followed, many an once,—
 And now at last among the suns

In that high vision. But indeed
 It may be memory did recall
 Last to him then the first of all,—
 The child his boyhood bore in heed
 Nine years. At length the voice brought peace,—
 " Even I, even I am Beatrice."

All this, being there, we had not seen.
 Seen only was the shadow wrought
 On the strong features bound in thought ;

* "*Quomodo sedet sola civitas !*" — the words quoted by Dante in the " Vita Nuova " when he speaks of the death of Beatrice.

The vagueness gaining gait and mien ;
The white streaks gathering clear to view
In the burnt beard the women knew.

For a tale tells that on his track,
As through Verona's streets he went,
This saying certain women sent :—
“ Lo, he that strolls to Hell and back
At will ! Behold him, how Hell's reek
Has crisped his beard and singed his cheek.”

“ Whereat ” (Boccaccio's words) “ he smil'd
For pride in fame.” It might be so :
Nevertheless we cannot know
If haply he were not beguil'd
To bitterer mirth, who scarce could tell
If he indeed were back from Hell.

So the day came, after a space,
When Dante felt assured that there
The sunshine must lie sicklier
Even than in any other place,
Save only Florence. When that day
Had come, he rose and went his way.

He went and turned not. From his shoes
It may be that he shook the dust,
As every righteous dealer must
Once and again ere life can close :
And unaccomplished destiny
Struck cold his forehead, it may be.

No book keeps record how the Prince
Sunned himself out of Dante's reach,
Nor how the Jester stank in speech ;
While courtiers, used to smile and wince,
Poets and harlots, all the throng,
Let loose their scandal and their song.

No book keeps record if the seat
 Which Dante held at his host's board
 Were sat in next by clerk or lord,—
 If leman lolled with dainty feet
 At ease, or hostage brooded there,
 Or priest lacked silence for his prayer.

Eat and wash hands, Can Grande ; — scarce
 We know their deeds now : hands which fed
 Our Dante with that bitter bread ;
 And thou the watch-dog of those stairs
 Which, of all paths his feet knew well,
 Were steeper found than Heaven or Hell.

JENNY.

“Vengeance of Jenny’s case ! Fie on her ! Never name her,
 child !” — (*Mrs. Quickly.*)

LAZY laughing languid Jenny,
 Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea,
 Whose head upon my knee to-night
 Rests for a while, as if grown light
 With all our dances and the sound
 To which the wild tunes spun you round ;
 Fair Jenny mine, the thoughtless queen
 Of kisses which the blush between
 Could hardly make much daintier ;
 Whose eyes are as blue skies, whose hair
 Is countless gold incomparable :
 Fresh flower, scarce touched with signs that tell
 Of Love’s exuberant hotbed : — Nay,
 Poor flower left torn since yesterday
 Until to-morrow leave you bare ;
 Poor handful of bright spring-water
 Flung in the whirlpool’s shrieking face ;

Poor shameful Jenny, full of grace
 Thus with your head upon my knee ; —
 Whose person or whose purse may be
 The loadstar of your reverie ?

This room of yours, my Jenny, looks
 A change from mine so full of books,
 Whose serried ranks hold fast, forsooth,
 So many captive hours of youth,—
 The hours they thief from day and night
 To make one's cherished work come right,
 And leave it wrong for all their theft,
 Even as to-night my work was left :
 Until I vowed that since my brain
 And eyes of dancing seemed so fain,
 My feet should have some dancing too : —
 And thus it was I met with you.
 Well, I suppose 'twas hard to part,
 For here I am. And now, sweetheart,
 You seem too tired to get to bed.

It was a careless life I led
 When rooms like this were scarce so strange,
 Not long ago. What breeds the change,—
 The many aims or the few years ?
 Because to-night it all appears
 Something I do not know again.

The cloud's not danced out of my brain,—
 The cloud that made it turn and swim
 While hour by hour the books grew dim.
 Why, Jenny, as I watch you there,—
 For 't' your wealth of loosened hair,
 Your silk ungirdled and unlac'd
 And warm sweets open to the waist,
 All golden in the lamplight's gleam,—
 You know not what a book you seem,
 Half-read by lightning in a dream !
 How should you know, my Jenny ? Nay,

And I should be ashamed to say : —
 Poor beauty, so well worth a kiss !
 But while my thought runs on like this
 With wasteful whims more than enough,
 I wonder what you're thinking of.

If of myself you think at all,
 What is the thought ? — conjectural
 On sorry matters best unsolved ? —
 Or inly is each grace revolved
 To fit me with a lure ? — or (sad
 To think !) perhaps you're merely glad
 That I'm not drunk or ruffianly
 And let you rest upon my knee.

For sometimes, were the truth confess'd,
 You're thankful for a little rest,—
 Glad from the crush to rest within,
 From the heart-sickness and the din
 Where envy's voice at virtue's pitch
 Mocks you because your gown is rich ;
 And from the pale girl's dumb rebuke,
 Whose ill-clad grace and toil-worn look
 Proclaim the strength that keeps her weak
 And other nights than yours bespeak ;
 And from the wise unchildish elf,
 To schoolmate lesser than himself,
 Pointing you out, what thing you are : —
 Yes, from the daily jeer and jar,
 From shame and shame's outbraving too,
 Is rest not sometimes sweet to you ? —
 But most from the hatefulness of man
 Who spares not to end what he began,
 Whose acts are ill and his speech ill,
 Who, having used you at his will,
 Thrusts you aside, as when I dine
 I serve the dishes and the wine.

Well, handsome Jenny mine, sit up,
 I've filled our glasses, let us sup,

And do not let me think of you,
 Lest shame of yours suffice for two.
 What, still so tired? Well, well then keep
 Your head there, so you do not sleep;
 But that the weariness may pass
 And leave you merry, take this glass.
 Ah! lazy lily hand, more bless'd
 If ne'er in rings it had been dress'd
 Nor ever by a glove conceal'd!

Behold the lilies of the field,
 They toil not neither do they spin;
 (So doth the ancient text begin,—
 Not of such rest as one of these
 Can share.) Another rest and ease
 Along each summer-sated path
 From its new lord the garden hath,
 Than that whose spring in blessings ran
 Which praised the bounteous husbandman,
 Ere yet, in days of hankering breath,
 The lilies sickened unto death.

What, Jenny, are your lilies dead?
 Ay, and the snow-white leaves are spread
 Like winter on the garden-bed.
 But you had roses left in May,—
 They were not gone too. Jenny, nay,
 But must your roses die, and those
 Their purpled buds that should uncloset?
 Even so; the leaves are curled apart,
 Still red as from the broken heart,
 And here's the naked stem of thorns.

Nay, nay, mere words. Here nothing warns
 As yet of winter. Sickness here
 Or want alone could waken fear,—
 Nothing but passion wrings a tear.
 Except when there may rise unsought
 Haply at times a passing thought
 Of the old days which seem to be

Much older than any history
 That is written in any book ;
 When she would lie in fields and look
 Along the ground through the blown grass,
 And wonder where the city was.
 Far out of sight, whose broil and bale.
 They told her then for a child's tale.

Jenny, you know the city now.
 A child can tell the tale there, how
 Some things which are not yet enroll'd
 In market-lists are bought and sold
 Even till the early Sunday light,
 When Saturday night is market-night
 Everywhere, be it dry or wet,
 And market-night in the Haymarket.
 Our learned London children know,
 Poor Jenny, all your pride and woe ;
 Have seen your lifted silken skirt
 Advertise dainties through the dirt ;
 Have seen your coach-wheels splash rebuke
 On virtue ; and have learned your look
 When, wealth and health slipped past, you stare
 Along the streets alone, and there,
 Round the long park, across the bridge,
 The cold lamps at the pavement's edge
 Wind on together and apart,
 A fiery serpent for your heart.

Let the thoughts pass, an empty cloud !
 Suppose I were to think aloud,—
 What if to her all this were said ?
 Why, as a volume seldom read
 Being opened halfway shuts again,
 So might the pages of her brain
 Be parted at such words, and thence
 Close back upon the dusty sense.
 For is there hue or shape defin'd
 In Jenny's desecrated mind,
 Where all contagious currents meet,

A Lethe of the middle street?
 Nay, it reflects not any face,
 Nor sound is in its sluggish pace,
 But as they coil those eddies clot,
 And night and day remember not.

Why, Jenny, you're asleep at last! —
 Asleep, poor Jenny, hard and fast,—
 So young and soft and tired; so fair,
 With chin thus nestled in your hair,
 Mouth quiet, eyelids almost blue
 As if some sky of dreams shone through!

Just as another woman sleeps!
 Enough to throw one's thoughts in heaps
 Of doubt and horror,— what to say
 Or think,— this awful secret sway,
 The potter's power over the clay!
 Of the same lump (it has been said)
 For honor and dishonor made,
 Two sister vessels. Here is one.

My cousin Nell is fond of fun,
 And fond of dress, and change, and praise,
 So mere a woman in her ways:
 And if her sweet eyes rich in youth
 Are like her lips that tell the truth,
 My cousin Nell is fond of love.
 And she's the girl I'm proudest of.
 Who does not prize her, guard her well?
 The love of change, in cousin Nell,
 Shall find the best and hold it dear
 The unconquered mirth turn quieter
 Not through her own, through others' woe:
 The conscious pride of beauty glow
 Beside another's pride in her,
 One little part of all they share.
 For Love himself shall ripen these
 In a kind soil to just increase
 Through years of fertilizing peace.

Of the same lump (as it is said)
 For honor and dishonor made,
 Two sister vessels. Here is one.

It makes a goblin of the sun.

So pure,— so fall'n ! How dare to think
 Of the first common kindred link ?
 Yet, Jenny, till the world shall burn
 It seems that all things take their turn ;
 And who shall say but this fair tree
 May need, in changes that may be,
 Your children's children's charity ?
 Scorned then, no doubt, as you are scorn'd
 Shall no man hold his pride forewarn'd
 Till in the end, the Day of Days,
 At judgment, one of his own race,
 As frail and lost as you, shall rise,—
 His daughter, with his mother's eyes ?

How Jenny's clock ticks on the shelf !
 Might not the dial scorn itself
 That has such hours to register ?
 Yet as to me, even so to her
 Are golden sun and silver moon,
 In daily largess of earth's boon,
 Counted for life-coins to one tune.
 And if, as blindfold fates are toss'd,
 Through some one man this life be lost,
 Shall soul not somehow pay for soul ?

Fair shines the gilded aureole
 In which our highest painters place
 Some living woman's simple face.
 And the stilled features thus descried
 As Jenny's long throat droops aside,—
 The shadows where the cheeks are thin,
 And pure wide curve from ear to chin,—
 With Raphael's, Leonardo's hand
 To show them to men's souls, might stand,

Whole ages long, the whole world through,
 For preachings of what God can do.
 What has man done here ? How atone,
 Great God, for this which man has done ?
 And for the body and soul which by
 Man's pitiless doom must now comply
 With lifelong hell, what lullaby
 Of sweet forgetful second birth
 Remains ? All dark. No sign on earth
 What measure of God's rest endows
 The many mansions of his house.

If but a woman's heart might see
 Such erring heart unerringly
 For once ! But that can never be.

Like a rose shut in a book
 In which pure women may not look,
 Nor its base pages claim control
 To crush the flower within the soul ;
 Where through each dead rose-leaf that elings,
 Pale as transparent psyche-wings,
 To the vile text, are traced such things
 As might make lady's cheek indeed
 More than a living rose to read ;
 So naught save foolish foulness may
 Watch with hard eyes the sure decay ;
 And so the life-blood of this rose,
 Puddled with shameful knowledge, flows
 Through leaves no chaste hand may uncloze ;
 Yet still it keeps such faded show
 Of when 'twas gathered long ago,
 That the crushed petals' lovely grain,
 The sweetness of the sanguine stain,
 Seen of a woman's eyes, must make
 Her pitiful heart, so prone to ache,
 Love roses better for its sake : —
 Only that this can never be : —
 Even so unto her sex is she.

Yet, Jenny, looking long at you,
 The woman almost fades from view.
 A cipher of man's changeless sum
 Of lust, past, present, and to come,
 Is left. A riddle that one shrinks
 To challenge from the scornful sphinx.

Like a toad within a stone
 Seated while Time crumbles on ;
 Which sits there since the earth was curs'd
 For Man's transgression at the first ;
 Which, living through all centuries,
 Not once has seen the sun arise ;
 Whose life, to its cold circle charmed,
 The earth's whole summers have not warmed ;
 Which always — whitherso the stone
 Be flung — sits there, deaf, blind, alone ; —
 Ay, and shall not be driven out
 Till that which shuts him round about
 Break at the very Master's stroke,
 And the dust thereof vanish as smoke,
 And the seed of Man vanish as dust : —
 Even so within this world is Lust.

Come, come, what use in thoughts like this ?
 Poor little Jenny, good to kiss, —
 You'd not believe by what strange roads
 Thought travels, when your beauty goads
 A man to-night to think of toads !
 Jenny, wake up. . . . Why, there's the dawn !

And there's an early wagon drawn
 To market, and some sheep that jog
 Bleating before a barking dog ;
 And the old streets come peering through
 Another night that London knew ;
 And all as ghostlike as the lamps.

So on the wings of day decamps
 My last night's frolic. Glooms begin
 To shiver off as lights creep in

Past the gauze curtains half drawn-to
 And the lamp's doubled shade grows blue,—
 Your lamp, my Jenny, kept alight,
 Like a wise virgin's, all one night !
 And in the alcove coolly spread
 Glimmers with dawn your empty bed ;
 And yonder your fair face I see
 Reflected lying on my knee,
 Where teems with first foreshadowings
 Your pier-glass scrawled with diamond rings :
 And on your bosom all night worn
 Yesterday's rose now droops forlorn
 But dies not yet this summer morn.

And now without, as if some word
 Had called upon them that they heard,
 The London sparrows far and nigh
 Clamor together suddenly ;
 And Jenny's cage-bird grown awake
 Here in their song his part must take,
 Because here too the day doth break.

And somehow in myself the dawn
 Among stirred clouds and veils withdrawn
 Strikes grayly on her. Let her sleep.
 But will it wake her if I heap
 These cushions thus beneath her head
 Where my knee was ? No,— there's your bed,
 My Jenny, while you dream. And there
 I lay among your golden hair
 Perhaps the subject of your dreams,
 These golden coins.

For still one deems
 That Jenny's flattering sleep confers
 New magic on the magic purse,—
 Grim web, how clogged with shriveled flies !
 Between the threads fine fumes arise
 And shape their pictures in the brain.
 There roll no streets in glare and rain,

Nor flagrant man-swine whets his tusk ;
 But delicately sighs in musk
 The homage of the dim boudoir ;
 Or like a palpitating star
 Thrilled into song, the opera-night
 Breathes faint in the quick pulse of light ;
 Or at the carriage-window shine
 Rich wares for choice ; or, free to dine,
 Whirls through its hour of health (divine
 For her) the concourse of the Park.
 And though in the discounted dark
 Her functions there and here are one,
 Beneath the lamps and in the sun
 There reigns at least the acknowledged belle
 Appareled beyond parallel.
 Ah, Jenny, yes, we know your dreams.

For even the Paphian Venus seems
 A goddess o'er the realms of love,
 When silver-shrined in shadowy grove :
 Ay, or let offerings nicely placed
 But hide Priapus to the waist,
 And whoso looks on him shall see
 An eligible deity.

Why, Jenny, waking here alone
 May help you to remember one,
 Though all the memory's long outworn
 Of many a double-pillowed morn.
 I think I see you when you wake,
 And rub your eyes for me, and shake
 My gold, in rising, from your hair,
 A Danaë for a moment there.

Jenny, my love rang true ! for still
 Love at first sight is vague, until
 That tinkling makes him audible.

And must I mock you to the last,
 Ashamed of my own shame,— aghast
 Because some thoughts not born amiss

Rose at a poor fair face like this ?

Well, of such thoughts so much I know :
In my life, as in hers, they show,
By a far gleam which I may near,
A dark path I can strive to clear.

Only one kiss. Good-by, my dear.

THE PORTRAIT.

THIS is her picture as she was :

It seems a thing to wonder on,
As though mine image in the glass
Should tarry when myself am gone.
I gaze until she seems to stir,—
Until mine eyes almost aver
That now, even now, the sweet lips part
To breathe the words of the sweet heart:—
And yet the earth is over her.

Alas ! even such the thin-drawn ray
That makes the prison-depths more rude,—
The drip of water night and day
Giving a tongue to solitude.
Yet only this, of love's whole prize,
Remains ; save what in mournful guise
Takes counsel with my soul alone,—
Save what is secret and unknown,
Below the earth, above the skies.

In painting her I shrined her face
'Mid mystic trees, where light falls in
Hardly at all ; a covert place
Where you might think to find a din
Of doubtful talk, and a live flame
Wandering, and many a shape whose name

Not itself knoweth, and old dew,
And your own footsteps meeting you,
And all things going as they came.

A deep dim wood ; and there she stands
As in that wood that day : for so
Was the still movement of her hands
And such the pure line's gracious flow.
And passing fair the type must seem,
Unknown the presence and the dream.
'Tis she : though of herself, alas !
Less than her shadow on the grass
Or than her image in the stream.

That day we met there, I and she
One with the other all alone ;
And we were blithe ; yet memory
Saddens those hours, as when the moon
Looks upon daylight. And with her
I stooped to drink the spring-water,
Athirst where other waters sprang ;
And where the echo is, she sang,—
My soul another echo there.

But when that hour my soul won strength
For words whose silence wastes and kills,
Dull raindrops smote us, and at length
Thundered the heat within the hills.
That eve I spoke those words again
Beside the pelted window-pane ;
And there she hearkened what I said,
With under-glances that surveyed
The empty pastures blind with rain.

Next day the memories of these things,
Like leaves through which a bird has flown,
Still vibrated with Love's warm wings ;
Till I must make them all my own
And paint this picture. So, 'twixt ease

Of talk and sweet long silences,
 She stood among the plants in bloom
 At windows of a summer room,
 To feign the shadow of the trees.

And as I wrought, while all above
 And all around was fragrant air,
 In the sick burthen of my love
 It seemed each sun-thrilled blossom there
 Beat like a heart among the leaves.
 O heart that never beats nor heaves,
 In that one darkness lying still,
 What now to thee my love's great will
 Or the fine web the sunshine weaves?

For now doth daylight disavow
 Those days,— naught left to see or hear.
 Only in solemn whispers now
 At night-time these things reach mine ear,
 When the leaf-shadows at a breath
 Shrink in the road, and all the heath,
 Forest and water, far and wide,
 In limpid starlight glorified,
 Lie like the mystery of death.

Last night at last I could have slept,
 And yet delayed my sleep till dawn,
 Still wandering. Then it was I wept :
 For unawares I came upon
 Those glades where once she walked with me :
 And as I stood there suddenly,
 All wan with traversing the night,
 Upon the desolate verge of light
 I heard loud the iron-bosomed sea.

Even so, where Heaven holds breath and hears
 The beating heart of Love's own breast,—
 Where round the secret of all spheres
 All angels lay their wings to rest,—
 How shall my soul stand rapt and awed,

When, by the new birth borne abroad
 Throughout the music of the suns,
 It enters in her soul at once
 And knows the silence there for God!

Here with her face doth memory sit
 Meanwhile, and wait the day's decline,
 Till other eyes shall look from it,
 Eyes of the spirit's Palestine,
 Even than the old gaze tenderer :
 While hopes and aims long lost with her
 Stand round her image side by side,
 Like tombs of pilgrims that have died
 About the Holy Sepulchre.

SISTER HELEN.

"WHY did you melt your waxen man,
 Sister Helen?

To-day is the third since you began."

"The time was long, yet the time ran,
 Little brother."

(*O Mother, Mary Mother,
 Three days to-day, between Hell and Heaven!*)

"But if you have done your work aright,
 Sister Helen,

You'll let me play, for you said I might."

"Be very still in your play to-night,
 Little brother."

(*O Mother, Mary Mother,
 Third night, to-night, between Hell and Heaven!*)

"You said it must melt ere vesper-bell,
 Sister Helen

If now it be molten, all is well."

“Hush, heard you a horse-tread as you spake,
Little brother?”
(*O Mother, Mary Mather,*
What sound to-night, between Hell and Heaven?)

"I hear a horse-tread, and I see,
Sister Helen,
Three horsemen that ride terribly."
"Little brother, whence come the three,
Little brother?"
(O Mother, Mary Mother,
Whence should they come, between Hell and Heaven?)

“Little brother, whence come the three,
 Little brother?”
(O Mother, Mary Mother,
Whence should they come, between Hell and Heaven?)

“They come by the hill-verge from Boyne Bar,
Sister Helen,
And one draws nigh, but two are afar.”

“Look, look, do you know them who they are,
Little brother?”
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,
Who should they be, between Hell and Heaven?*)

"Oh, it's Keith of Eastholm rides so fast,
Sister Helen,

“The hour has come, has come at last,
 Little brother ! ”
(O Mother, Mary Mother,
Her hour at last, between Hell and Heaven !)

“He has made a sign and called Halloo !
Sister Helen
And he says that he would speak with you.”

“Oh tell him I fear the frozen dew,
 Little brother.”
(O Mother, Mary Mother,
Why laughs she thus, between Hell and Heaven D

(O Mother, Mary Mother,
Why laughs she thus, between Hell and Heaven !)

"The wind is loud, but I hear him cry,
Sister Helen,
That Keith of Ewern's like to die."

“My heart for his pleasure fared the same,
 Little brother.”
 (O Mother, Mary Mother,
 Fire at the heart, between Hell and Heaven!)

“Here’s Keith of Westholm riding fast,
Sister Helen,
For I know the white plume on the blast.”
“The hour, the sweet hour I forecast,
Little brother !”
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Is the hour sweet, between Hell and Heaven ?)

“He stops to speak, and he stills his horse,
Sister Helen;
But his words are drowned in the wind’s course.”
“Nay hear, nay hear, you must hear perforce,
Little brother!”
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,
What word now heard, between Hell and Heaven?*)

“Oh he says that Keith of Ewern’s cry,
Sister Helen,
Is ever to see you ere he die.”
“In all that his soul sees, there am I,
Little brother !”
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,
The soul’s one sight, between Hell and Heaven !*)

“He sends a ring and a broken coin,
Sister Helen,
And bids you mind the banks of Boyne.”
“What else he broke will he ever join,
Little brother?”
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,
No, never joined, between Hell and Heaven!*)

“He yields you these and craves full fain,
Sister Helen,
You pardon him in his mortal pain.”

Fire cannot slay it, it shall thrive,
Little brother !"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Alas, alas, between Hell and Heaven !)

“He cries to you, kneeling in the road,
Sister Helen,
To go with him for the love of God!”
“The way is long to his son’s abode,
Little brother.”
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,
The way is long, between Hell and Heaven!*)

“A lady’s here, by a dark steed brought,
Sister Helen,
So darkly clad, I saw her not.”
“See her now or never see aught,
Little brother !”
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,
What more to see, between Hell and Heaven ?*)

"Her hood falls back, and the moon shines fair
 Sister Helen,
 On the Lady of Ewern's golden hair."
 "Blest hour of my power and her despair,
 Little brother!"
 (*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Hour blest and bann'd, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Pale, pale her cheeks, that in pride did glow,
 Sister Helen,
 'Neath the bridal-wreath three days ago."
 "One morn for pride and three days for woe,
 Little brother!"
(O Mother, Mary Mother,
Three days, three nights, between Hell and Heaven!)

“Her clasped hands stretch from her bending head,
Sister Helen ;
With the loud wind’s wail her sobs are wed.”

"More fast the naked soul doth flee,
Little brother!"
(O Mother, Mary Mother,
The naked soul, between Hell and Heaven!)

“Flank to flank are the three steeds gone,
Sister Helen,
But the lady’s dark steed goes alone.”
“And lonely her bridegroom’s soul hath flown,
Little brother.”
(*Mother, Mary Mother,
The lonely ghost, between Hell and Heaven!*)

“Oh the wind is sad in the iron chill,
Sister Helen,
And weary sad they look by the hill.”
“But he and I are sadder still,
Little brother !”
(O Mother, Mary Mother,
Most sad of all, between Hell and Heaven !)

"See, see, the wax has dropped from its place,
Sister Helen,
And the flames are winning up apace!"
"Yet here they burn but for a space,
Little brother!"
(O Mother, Mary Mother,
Here for a space, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Ah ! what white thing at the door has cross'd,
Sister Helen ?
Ah ! what is this that sighs in the frost ?"
"A soul that's lost as mine is lost,
Little brother !"
(O Mother, Mary Mother,
Lost, lost, all lost, between Hell and Heaven !)

STRATTON WATER.

"O HAVE you seen the Stratton flood
That's great with rain to-day ?
It runs beneath your wall, Lord Sands,
Full of the new-mown hay.

"I led your hounds to Hutton bank
To bathe at early morn :
They got their bath by Borrowbrake
Above the standing corn."

Out from the castle-stair Lord Sands
Looked up the western lea ;
The rook was grieving on her nest,
The flood was round her tree.

Over the castle-wall Lord Sands
Looked down the eastern hill :
The stakes swam free among the boats,
The flood was rising still.

"What's yonder far below that lies
So white against the slope ?"
"O it's a sail o' your bonny barks
The waters have washed up."

"But I have never a sail so white,
And the water's not yet there."
"O it's the swans o' your bonny lake
The rising flood doth scare."

"The swans they would not hold so still,
So high they would not win."
"O it's Joyce my wife has spread her smock
And fears to fetch it in."

"Nay, knave, it's neither sail nor swans,
Nor aught that you can say ;
For though your wife might leave her smock,
Herself she'd bring away."

Lord Sands has passed the turret-stair,
The court, and yard, and all ;
The kine were in the byre that day,
The nags were in the stall.

Lord Sands has won the weltering slope
Whereon the white shape lay :
The clouds were still above the hill,
And the shape was still as they.

Oh pleasant is the gaze of life
And sad is death's blind head ;
But awful are the living eyes
In the face of one thought dead !

"In God's name, Janet, is it me
Thy ghost has come to seek ?"
"Nay, wait another hour, Lord Sands,—
Be sure my ghost shall speak."

A moment stood he as a stone,
Then groveled to his knee.
"O Janet, O my love, my love,
Rise up and come with me !"
"Once before you bade me come,
And it's here you have brought me !

"O many's the sweet word, Lord Sands,
You've spoken oft to me ;
But all that I have from you to-day
Is the rain on my body.

"And many's the good gift, Lord Sands,
You've promised oft to me ;
But the gift of yours I keep to-day
Is the babe in my body.

"O it's not in any earthly bed
That first my babe I'll see ;
For I have brought my body here
That the flood may cover me."

His face was close against her face,
His hands of hers were fain :
O her wet cheeks were hot with tears,
Her wet hands cold with rain.

“ They told me you were dead, Janet,—
How could I guess the lie ? ”
“ They told me you were false, Lord Sands,—
What could I do but die ? ”

“ Now keep you well, my brother Giles,—
Through you I deemed her dead !
As wan as your towers be to-day,
To-morrow they'll be red.

“ Look down, look down, my false mother,
That bade me not to grieve :
You'll look up when our marriage fires
Are lit to-morrow eve.

“ O more than one and more than two
The sorrow of this shall see :
But it's to-morrow, love, for them,—
To-day's for thee and me.”

He's drawn her face between his hands
And her pale mouth to his :
No bird that was so still that day
Chirps sweeter than his kiss.

The flood was creeping round their feet.
“ O Janet, come away !
The hall is warm for the marriage-rite,
The bed for the birthday.”

“ Nay, but I hear your mother cry,
'Go bring this bride to bed !
And would she christen her babe unborn,
So wet she comes to wed ? ’

"I'll be your wife to cross your door
 And meet your mother's e'e.
 We plighted troth to wed i' the kirk,
 And it's there I'll wed with ye."

He's ta'en her by the short girdle
 And by the dripping sleeve :
 "Go fetch Sir Jock my mother's priest,—
 You'll ask of him no leave.

"O it's one half-hour to reach the kirk
 And one for the marriage-rite ;
 And kirk and castle and castle-lands
 Shall be our babe's to-night."

"The 'ood's in the kirkyard, Lord Sands,
 And round the belfry-stair."
 "I bade ye fetch the priest," he said,
 "Myself shall bring him there.

"It's for the lilt of wedding bells
 We'll have the hail to pour,
 And for the clink of bridle-reins
 The plashing of the oar."

Beneath them on the nether hill
 A boat was floating wide :
 Lord Sands swam out and caught the oars
 And rode to the hill-side.

He's wrapped her in a green mantle
 And set her softly in ;
 Her hair was wet upon her face,
 Her face was gray and thin ;
 And "Oh !" she said, "lie still, my babe,
 It's out you must not win !"

But woe's my heart for Father John !
 As hard as he might pray,
 There seemed no help but Noah's ark
 Or Jonah's fish that day.

The first strokes that the oars struck
Were over the broad leas ;
The next strokes that the oars struck
They pushed beneath the trees ;

The last stroke that the oars struck,
The good boat's head was met,
And there the gate of the kirkyard
Stood like a ferry-gate.

He's set his hand upon the bar
And lightly leaped within :
He's lifted her to his left shoulder,
Her knees beside his chin.

The graves lay deep beneath the flood
Under the rain alone ;
And when the foot-stone made him slip,
He held by the head-stone.

The empty boat thraved i' the wind,
Against the postern tied.
" Hold still, you've brought my love with me,
You shall take back my bride."

But woe's my heart for Father John
And the saints he clamored to !
There's never a saint but Christopher
Might hale such buttocks through !

And " Oh ! " she said, " on men's shoulders
I well had thought to wend,
And well to travel with a priest,
But not to have cared or ken'd.

" And oh ! " she said, " it's well this way
That I thought to have fared,—
Not to have lighted at the kirk
But stopped in the kirkyard.

"For it's oh and oh I prayed to God,
Whose rest I hoped to win,
That when to-night at your board-head
You'd bid the feast begin,
This water past your window-sill
Might bear my body in."

Now make the white bed warm and soft
And greet the merry morn.
The night the mother should have died
The young son shall be born.

THE STREAM'S SECRET.

WHAT thing unto mine ear
Wouldst thou convey,— what secret thing,
O wandering water ever whispering?
Surely thy speech shall be of her.
Thou water, O thou whispering wanderer,
What message dost thou bring?

Say, hath not Love leaned low
This hour beside thy far well head,
And there through jealous hollowed fingers said
The thing that most I long to know,—
Murmuring with curls all dabbled in thy flow
And washed lips rosy red?

He told it to thee there
Where thy voice hath a louder tone;
But where it welters to this little moan
His will decrees that I should hear.
Now speak: for with the silence is no fear
And I am all alone.

Shall Time not still endow
One hour with life, and I and she
Slake in one kiss the thirst of memory?

Say, stream ; lest Love should disavow
Thy service, and the bird upon the bough
Sing first to tell it me.

What whisperest thou ? Nay, why
Name the dead hours ? I mind them well :
Their ghosts in many darkened doorways dwell
With desolate eyes to know them by.
That hour must still be born ere it can die :
Of that I'd have thee tell.

But hear, before thou speak !
Withhold, I pray, the vain behest
That while the maze hath still its bower for quest
My burning heart should cease to seek.
Be sure that Love ordained for souls more meek
His roadside dells of rest.

Stream, when this silver thread
In flood-time is a torrent brown,
May any bulwark bind thy foaming crown ?
Shall not the waters surge and spread
And to the crannied boulders of their bed
Still shoot the dead drift down ?

Let no rebuke find place
In speech of thine : or it shall prove
That thou dost ill expound the words of Love,
Even as thine eddy's rippling race
Would blur the perfect image of his face.
I will have none thereof.

O learn and understand
That 'gainst the wrongs himself did wreak
Love sought her aid ; until her shadowy cheek
And eyes beseeching gave command ;
And compassed in her close compassionate hand
My heart must burn and speak.

For then at last we spoke
What eyes so oft had told to eyes
Through that long-lingering silence whose half-sighs
Alone the buried secret broke,
Which with snatched hands and lips' reverberate stroke
Then from the heart did rise.

But she is far away
Now ; nor the hours of night grown hoar
Bring yet to me, long gazing from the door,
The wind-stirred robe of roseate gray
And rose-crown of the hour that leads the day
When we shall meet once more.

Dark as thy blinded wave
When brimming midnight floods the glen,—
Bright as the laughter of thy runnels when
The dawn yields all the light they crave ;
Even so these hours to wound and that to save
Are sisters in Love's ken.

Oh sweet her bending grace
Then when I kneel beside her feet ;
And sweet her eyes' o'erhanging heaven ; and sweet
The gathering folds of her embrace ;
And her fall'n hair at last shed round my face
When breaths and tears shall meet.

Beneath her sheltering hair,
In the warm silence near her breast,
Our kisses and our sobs shall sink to rest ;
As in some still trance made aware
That day and night have wrought to fullness there
And Love has built our nest.

And as in the dim grove,
When the rains cease that hushed them long,
'Mid glistening boughs the song-birds wake to song,—
So from our hearts deep-shrined in love,
While the leaves throb beneath, around, above,
The quivering notes shall throng.

Till tenderest words found vain
Draw back to wonder mute and deep,
And closed lips in closed arm a silence keep,
Subdued by memory's circling strain,—
The wind-rapt sound that the wind brings again
While all the willows weep.

Then by her summoning art
Shall memory conjure back the sere
Autumnal Springs, from many a dying year
Born dead ; and, bitter to the heart,
The very ways where now we walk apart
Who then shall cling so near.

And with each thought new-grown,
Some sweet caress or some sweet name
Low-breathed shall let me know her thought the same,
Making me rich with every tone
And touch of the dear heaven so long unknown
That filled my dreams with flame.

Pity and love shall burn
In her pressed cheek and cherishing hands ;
And from the living spirit of love that stands
Between her lips to soothe and yearn,
Each separate breath shall clasp me round in turn
And loose my spirit's bands.

Oh passing sweet and dear,
Then when the worshiped form and face
Are felt at length in darkling close embrace ;
Round which so oft the sun shone clear,
With mocking light and pitiless atmosphere,
In many an hour and place.

Ah me ! with what proud growth
Shall that hour's thirsting race be run ;
While, for each several sweetness still begun

Afresh, endures love's endless drouth :
 Sweet hands, sweet hair, sweet cheeks, sweet eyes,
 sweet mouth,
 Each singly wooed and won.

Yet most with the sweet soul
 Shall love's espousals then be knit ;
 What time the governing cloud sheds peace from it
 O'er tremulous wings that touch the goal,
 And on the unmeasured height of Love's control
 The lustral fires are lit.

Therefore, when breast and cheek
 Now part, from long embraces free,—
 Each on the other gazing shall but see
 A self that has no need to speak :
 All things unsought, yet nothing more to seek,—
 One love in unity.

O water wandering past,—
 Albeit to thee I speak this thing,
 O water, thou that wanderest whispering,
 Thou keep'st thy counsel to the last.
 What spell upon thy bosom should Love cast,
 Its secret thence to wring ?

Nay, must thou hear the tale
 Of the past days,— the heavy debt
 Of life that obdurate time withholds,— ere yet
 To win thine ear these prayers prevail,
 And by thy voice Love's self with high All-hail
 Yield up the amulet ?

How should all this be told ? —
 All the sad sum of wayworn days ; —
 Heart's anguish in the impenetrable maze ;
 And on the waste uncolored wold
 The visible burthen of the sun grown cold
 And the moon's laboring gaze ?

Alas ! shall hope be nurs'd
 On life's all-succoring breast in vain,
 And made so perfect only to be slain ?
 Or shall not rather the sweet thirst
 Even yet rejoice the heart with warmth dispers'd
 And strength grown fair again ?

Stands it not by the door —
 Love's Hour — till she and I shall meet ;
 With bodiless form and unapparent feet
 That cast no shadow yet before,
 Though round its head the dawn begins to pour
 The breath that makes day sweet ?

Its eyes invisible
 Watch till the dial's thin-thrown shade
 Be born,— yea, till the journeying line be laid
 Upon the point that wakes the spell,
 And there in lovelier light than tongue can tell
 Its presence stand array'd.

Its soul remembers yet
 Those sunless hours that passed it by ;
 And still it hears the night's disconsolate cry,
 And feels the branches wringing wet
 Cast on its brow, that may not once forget,
 Dumb tears from the blind sky.

But oh ! when now her foot
 Draws near, for whose sake night and day
 Were long in weary longing sighed away,—
 The hour of Love, 'mid airs grown mute,
 Shall sing beside the door, and Love's own lute
 Thrill to the passionate lay.

Thou know'st, for Love has told
 Within thine ear, O stream, how soon
 That song shall lift its sweet appointed tune,
 O tell me, for my lips are cold,
 And in my veins the blood is waxing old
 Even while I beg the boon.

So, in that hour of sighs
Assuaged, shall we beside this stone
Yield thanks for grace ; while in thy mirror shown
The twofold image softly lies,
Until we kiss, and each in other's eyes
Is imaged all alone.

Still silent ? Can no art
Of Love's then move thy pity ? Nay,
To thee let nothing come that owns his sway :
Let happy lovers have no part
With thee ; nor even so sad and poor a heart
As thou hast spurned to-day.

To-day ? Lo ! night is here.
The glen grows heavy with some veil
Risen from the earth or fall'n to make earth pale ;
And all stands hushed to eye and ear,
Until the night-wind shake the shade like fear
And every covert quail.

Ah ! by another wave
On other airs the hour must come
Which to thy heart, my love, shall call me home.
Between the lips of the low cave
Against that night the lapping waters lave,
And the dark lips are dumb.

But there Love's self doth stand,
And with Life's weary wings far flown,
And with Death's eyes that make the water moan,
Gathers the water in his hand :
And they that drink know naught of sky or land
But only love alone.

O soul-sequestered face
Far off,— O were that night but now !
So even beside that stream even I and thou
Through thirsting lips should draw Love's grace,
And in the zone of that supreme embrace
Bind aching breast and brow.

O water whispering
Still through the dark into mine ears,—
As with mine eyes, is it not now with hers?—
Mine eyes that add to thy cold spring,
Wan water, wandering water weltering,
This hidden tide of tears.

THE CARD-DEALER.

COULD you not drink her gaze like wine?
Yet though its splendor swoon
Into the silence languidly
As a tune into a tune,
Those eyes unravel the coiled night
And know the stars at noon.

The gold that's heaped beside her hand,
In truth rich prize it were ;
And rich the dreams that wreath her brows
With magic stillness there ;
And he were rich who should unwind
That woven golden hair.

Around her, where she sits, the dance
Now breathes its eager heat ;
And not more lightly or more true
Fall there the dancers' feet
Than fall her cards on the bright board
As 'twere an heart that beat.

Her fingers let them softly through,
Smooth polished silent things ;
And each one as it falls reflects
In swift light-shadowings,
Blood-red and purple, green and blue,
The great eyes of her rings.

Whom plays she with ? With thee, who lov'st
Those gems upon her hand ;
With me, who search her secret brows ;
With all men, bless'd or bann'd
We play together, she and we,
Within a vain strange land :

A land without any order,—
Day even as night, (one saith,) —
Where who lieth down ariseth not
Nor the sleeper awakeneth ;
A land of darkness as darkness itself
And of the shadow of death.

What be her cards, you ask ? Even these :—
The heart, that doth but crave
More, having fed ; the diamond,
Skilled to make base seem brave ;
The club, for smiting in the dark ;
The spade, to dig a grave.

And do you ask what game she plays ?
With me 'tis lost or won ;
With thee it is playing still ; with him
It is not well begun ;
But 'tis a game she plays with all
Beneath the sway o' the sun.

Thou seest the card that falls,— she knows
The card that followeth :
Her game in thy tongue is called Life,
As ebbs thy daily breath :
When she shall speak, thou'lt learn her tongue
And know she calls it Death.

MY SISTER'S SLEEP.*

SHE fell asleep on Christmas Eve :
At length the long-ungranted shade
Of weary eyelids overweigh'd
The pain naught else might yet relieve.

Our mother, who had leaned all day
Over the bed from chime to chime,
Then raised herself for the first time,
And as she sat her down, did pray.

Her little work table was spread
With work to finish. For the glare
Made by her candle, she had care
To work some distance from the bed.

Without, there was a cold moon up,
Of winter radiance sheer and thin ;
The hollow halo it was in
Was like an icy crystal cup.

Through the small room, with subtle sound
Of flame, by vents the fireshine drove
And reddened. In its dim alcove
The mirror shed a clearness round.

I had been sitting up some nights,
And my tired mind felt weak and blank ;
Like a sharp strengthening wine it drank
The stillness and the broken lights.

Twelve struck. That sound, by dwindling years
Heard in each hour, crept off ; and then
The ruffled silence spread again,
Like water that a pebble stirs.

* This little poem, written in 1847, was printed in a periodical at the outset of 1850. The meter, which is used by several old English writers, became celebrated a month or two later on the publication of "*In Memoriam*."

Our mother rose from where she sat ;
Her needles, as she laid them down,
Met lightly, and her silken gown
Settled : no other noise than that.

“Glory unto the Newly Born !”
So, as said angels, she did say ;
Because we were in Christmas Day,
Though it would still be long till morn.

Just then in the room over us
There was a pushing back of chairs,
As some who sat unawares
So late, now heard the hours, and rose.

With anxious softly-stepping haste
Our mother went where Margaret lay,
Fearing the sounds o’erhead — should they
Have broken her long watched-for rest !

She stooped an instant, calm, and turned ;
But suddenly turned back again ;
And all her features seemed in pain
With woe, and her eyes gazed and yearned.

For my part, I but hid my face,
And held my breath, and spoke no word :
There was none spoken ; but I heard
The silence for a little space.

Our mother bowed herself and wept :
And both my arms fell, and I said,
“God knows I knew that she was dead.”
And there, all white, my sister slept.

Then kneeling, upon Christmas morn
A little after twelve o’clock
We said, ere the first quarter struck,
“Christ’s blessing on the newly born !”

ASPECTA MEDUSA.

ANDROMEDA, by Perseus saved and wed,
 Hankered each day to see the Gorgon's head :
 Till o'er a fount he held it, bade her lean,
 And mirrored in the wave was safely seen
 That death she lived by.

Let not thine eyes know
 Any forbidden thing itself, although
 It once should save as well as kill : but be
 Its shadow upon life enough for thee.

A NEW-YEAR'S BURDEN.

ALONG the grass sweet airs are blown
 Our way this day in Spring.
 Of all the songs that we have known
 Now which one shall we sing ?
 Not that, my love, ah no ! —
 Not this, my love ? why, so ! —
 Yet both were ours, but hours will come and go.

The grove is all a pale frail mist,
 The new year sucks the sun.
 Of all the kisses that we kissed
 Now which shall be the one ?
 Not that, my love, ah no ! —
 Not this, my love ? — heigh-ho
 For all the sweets that all the winds can blow !

The branches cross above our eyes,
 The skies are in a net :
 And what's the thing beneath the skies
 We two would most forget ?
 Not birth, my love, no, no, —
 Not death, my love, no, no, —
 The love once ours, but ours long hours ago.

EVEN SO.

So it is, my dear.
All such things touch secret strings
 For heavy hearts to hear.
 So it is, my dear.

Very like indeed :
 Sea and sky, afar, on high,
 Sand and strewn seaweed,—
 Very like indeed.

But the sea stands spread
 As one wall with the flat skies,
 Where the lean black craft like flies
 Seem well-nigh stagnated,
 Soon to drop off dead.

Seemed it so to us
 When I was thine and thou wast mine,
 And all these things were thus,
 But all our world in us ?

Could we be so now ?
 Not if all beneath heaven's pall
 Lay dead but I and thou,
 Could we be so now !



AN OLD SONG ENDED.

*"How should I your true love know
 From another one?"*
*"By his cockle-hat and staff
 And his sandal-shoon."*

"And what signs have told you now
That he hastens home?"

"Lo ! the Spring is nearly gone,
He is nearly come."

"For a token is there naught,
Say, that he should bring?"

"He will bear a ring I gave
And another ring."

"How may I, when he shall ask,
Tell him who lies there?"

"Nay, but leave my face unveiled
And unbound my hair."

"Can you say to me some word
I shall say to him?"

"Say I'm looking in his eyes
Though my eyes are dim."

DOWN STREAM.

BETWEEN Holmscote and Hurstcote
The river-reaches wind,
The whispering trees accept the breeze,
The ripple's cool and kind :
With love low-whispered 'twixt the shores,
With rippling laughters gay,
With white arms bared to ply the oars,
On last year's first of May.

Between Holmscote and Hurstcote
The river's brimmed with rain,
Through close-met banks and parted banks
Now near now far again :
With parting tears caressed to smiles,

With meeting promised soon,
 With every sweet vow that beguiles,
 On last year's first of June.

Between Holmscote and Hurstcote
 The river's flecked with foam,
 'Neath shuddering clouds that hang in shrouds
 And lost winds wild for home :
 With infant wailings at the breast,
 With homeless steps astray,
 With wanderings shuddering tow'rds one rest
 On this year's first of May.

Between Holmscote and Hurstcote
 The summer river flows
 With doubled flight of moons by night
 And lilies' deep repose :
 With lo ! beneath the moon's white stare
 A white face not the moon,
 With lilies meshed in tangled hair,
 On this year's first of June.

Between Holmscote and Hurstcote
 A troth was given and riven,
 From heart's trust grew one life to two,
 Two lost lives cry to Heaven :
 With banks spread calm to meet the sky,
 With meadows newly mowed,
 The harvest-paths of glad July,
 The sweet school-children's road.

WELLINGTON'S FUNERAL.

18th November, 1852.

"VICTORY!"

So once more the cry must be.
Duteous mourning we fulfill
In God's name ; but by God's will,
Doubt not, the last word is still
"Victory!"

Funeral,

In the music round this pall,
Solemn grief yields earth to earth ;
But what tones of solemn mirth
In the pageant of new birth
Rise and fall ?

For indeed,

If our eyes were openèd,
Who shall say what escort floats
Here, which breath nor gleam denotes,—
Fiery horses, chariots
Fire-footed ?

Trumpeter,

Even thy call he may not hear ;
Long-known voice for ever past,
Till with one more trumpet-blast
God's assuring word at last
Reach his ear.

Multitude,

Hold your breath in reverent mood :
For while earth's whole kindred stand
Mute even thus on either hand,
This soul's labor shall be scann'd
And found good.

Cherubim,

Lift ye not even now your hymn ?
Lo ! once lent for human lack,
Michael's sword is rendered back.
Thrills not now the starry track,
Seraphim ?

Gabriel,

Since the gift of thine " All hail ! "
Out of heaven no time hath brought
Gift with fuller blessing fraught
Than the peace which this man wrought
Passing well.

Be no word

Raised of bloodshed Christ-abhorr'd.
Say : "'Twas thus in His decrees
Who himself, the Prince of Peace,
For his harvest's high increase
Sent a sword."

Veterans,

He by whom the neck of France
Then was given unto your heel,
Timely sought, may lend as well
To your sons his terrible
Countenance.

Waterloo !

As the last grave must renew,
Ere fresh death, the banshee-strain,—
So methinks upon thy plain
Falls some presage in the rain,
In the dew.

And O thou,

Watching with an exile's brow
Unappeased, o'er death's dumb flood :—
Lo ! the saving strength of God
In some new heart's English blood
Slumbers now.

Emperor,
 Is this all thy work was for? —
 Thus to see thy self-sought aim,
 Yea thy titles, yea thy name,
 In another's shame, to shame
 Bandied o'er?*

Wellington,
 Thy great work is but begun.
 With quick seed his end is rife
 Whose long tale of conquering strife
 Shows no triumph like his life
 Lost and won.

WORLD'S WORTH.

'Tis of the Father Hilary.

He strove, but could not pray; so took
 The steep-coiled stair, where his feet shook
 A sad blind echo. Ever up
 He toiled. 'Twas a sick sway of air
 That autumn noon within the stair,
 As dizzy as a turning cup.
 His brain benumbed him, void and thin;
 He shut his eyes and felt it spin;
 The obscure deafness hemmed him in.
 He said: "O world, what world for me?"

He leaned unto the balcony
 Where the chime keeps the night and day;
 It hurt his brain, he could not pray.
 He had his face upon the stone:
 Deep 'twixt the narrow shafts, his eye
 Passed all the roofs to the stark sky,
 Swept with no wing, with wind alone.

* Date of the *Coup d'État*: 2nd December, 1851.

Close to his feet the sky did shake
 With wind in pools that the rains make :
 The ripple set his eyes to ache.
 He said : " O world, what world for me ? "

He stood within the mystery
 Girding God's blessed Eucharist :
 The organ and the chant had ceas'd.
 The last words paused against his ear
 Said from the altar : drawn round him
 The gathering rest was dumb and dim.
 And now the sacring-bell rang clear
 And ceased ; and all was awe,— the breath
 Of God in man that warranteth
 The inmost utmost things of faith.
 He said : " O God, my world in thee ! "

THE BRIDE'S PRELUDE.

" SISTER," said busy Amelotte
 To listless Aloÿse ;
 " Along your wedding-road the wheat
 Bends as to hear your horse's feet,
 And the noonday stands still for heat. "

Amelotte laughed into the air
 With eyes that sought the sun :
 But where the walls in long brocade
 Were screened, as one who is afraid
 Sat Aloÿse within the shade.

And even in shade was gleam enough
 To shut out full repose
 From the bride's 'tiring-chamber, which
 Was like the inner altar-niche
 Whose dimness worship has made rich.

Within the window's heaped recess
The light was counterchanged
In blent reflexes manifold
From perfume-caskets of wrought gold
And gems the bride's hair could not hold

All thrust together : and with these
A slim-curved lute, which now,
At Amelotte's sudden passing there,
Was swept in somehow unaware,
And shook to music the close air.

Against the haloed lattice-panes
The bridesmaid sunned her breast,
Then to the glass turned tall and free,
And braced and shifted daintily
Her loin-belt through her côte-hardie.

The belt was silver, and the clasp
Of lozenged arm-bearings ;
A world of mirrored tints minute
The rippling sunshine wrought into 't,
That flushed her hand and warmed her foot

At least an hour had Aloÿse,—
Her jewels in her hair,—
Her white gown, as became a bride,
Quartered in silver at each side,—
Sat thus aloof, as if to hide.

Over her bosom, that lay still,
The vest was rich in grain,
With close pearls wholly overset :
Around her throat the fastenings met
Of chevesayle and mantelet.

Her arms were laid along her lap
With the hands open ; life
Itself did seem at fault in her :
Beneath the drooping brows, the stir
Of thought made noonday heavier.

Long sat she silent ; and then raised
 Her head, with such a gasp
 As while she summoned breath to speak
 Fanned high that furnace in the cheek
 But sucked the heart-pulse cold and weak.

(Oh gather round her now, all ye
 Past seasons of her fear,—
 Sick springs, and summers deadly cold !
 To flight your hovering wings unfold,
 For now your secret shall be told.

Ye many sunlights, barbed with darts
 Of dread detecting flame,—
 Gaunt moonlights that like sentinels
 Went past with iron clank of bells,—
 Draw round and render up your spells !)

“Sister,” said Aloÿse, “I had
 A thing to tell thee of
 Long since, and could not. But do thou
 Kneel first in prayer awhile, and bow
 Thine heart, and I will tell thee now.”

Amelotte wondered with her eyes ;
 But her heart said in her :
 “Dear Aloÿse would have me pray
 Because the awe she feels to-day
 Must need more prayers than she can say.”

So Amelotte put by the folds
 That covered up her feet,
 And knelt,—beyond the arras'd gloom
 And the hot window's dull perfume,—
 Where day was stillest in the room.

“Queen Mary, hear,” she said, “and say
 To Jesus the Lord Christ,
 This bride's new joy, which He confers,
 New joy to many ministers,
 And many griefs are bound in hers.”

The bride turned in her chair, and hid
Her face against the back,
And took her pearl-girt elbows in
Her hands, and could not yet begin,
But shuddering, uttered, "Urscelyn !"

Most weak she was ; for as she pressed
Her hand against her throat,
Along the arras she let trail
Her face, as if all heart did fail,
And sat with shut eyes, dumb and pale.

Amelotte still was on her knees
As she had kneeled to pray.
Deeming her sister swooned, she thought,
At first, some succor to have brought ;
But Aloyse rocked, as one distraught.

She would have pushed the lattice wide
To gain what breeze might be ;
But marking that no leaf once beat
The outside casement, it seemed meet
Not to bring in more scent and heat.

So she said only : " Aloyse,
Sister, when happened it
At any time that the bride came
To ill, or spoke in fear of shame,
When speaking first the bridegroom's name ? "

A bird had out its song and ceased
Ere the bride spoke. As length
She said : " The name is as the thing : —
Sin hath no second christening,
And shame is all that shame can bring.

" In divers places many an while
I would have told thee this ;
But faintness took me, or a fit
Like fever. God would not permit
That I should change thine eyes with it.

"Yet once I spoke, hadst thou but heard : —
That time we wandered out
All the sun's hours, but missed our way
When evening darkened, and so lay
The whole night covered up in hay.

"At last my face was hidden : so,
Having God's hint, I paused
Not long ; but drew myself more near
Where thou wast laid, and shook off fear,
And whispered quick into thine ear

"Something of the whole tale. At first
I lay and bit my hair
For the sore silence thou didst keep :
Till, as thy breath came long and deep,
I knew that thou hadst been asleep.

"The moon was covered, but the stars
Lasted till morning broke.
Awake, thou told'st me that thy dream
Had been of me,— that all did seem
At jar,— but that it was a dream.

"I knew God's hand and might not speak.
After that night I kept
Silence and let the record swell :
Till now there is much more to tell
Which must be told out ill or well."

She paused then, weary, with dry lips
Apart. From the outside
By fits there boomed a dull report
From where i' the hanging tennis-court
The bridegroom's retinue made sport.

The room lay still in dusty glare,
Having no sound through it
Except the chirp of a caged bird
That came and ceased : and if she stirred,
Amelotte's raiment could be heard.

Quoth Amelotte : “The night this chanced
Was a late summer night
Last year ! What secret, for Christ’s love,
Keep’st thou since then ? Mary above !
What thing is this thou speakest of ?

“Mary and Christ ! Lest when ’tis told
I should be prone to wrath,—
This prayer beforehand ! How she errs
Soe’er, take count of grief like hers,
Whereof the days are turned to years !”

She bowed her neck, and having said,
Kept on her knees to hear ;
And then, because strained thought demands
Quiet before it understands,
Darkened her eyesight with her hands.

So when at last her sister spoke,
She did not see the pain
O’ the mouth nor the ashamed eyes,
But marked the breath that came in sighs
And the half-pausing for replies.

This was the bride’s sad prelude-strain :—
“I’ the convent where a girl
I dwelt till near my womanhood,
I had but preachings of the rood
And Aves told in solitude

“To spend my heart on : and my hand
Had but the weary skill
To eke out upon silken cloth
Christ’s visage, or the long bright growth
Of Mary’s hair, or Satan wroth.

“So when at last I went, and thou,
A child not known before,
Didst come to take the place I left,
My limbs, after such lifelong theft
Of life, could be but little left

"In all that ministers delight
To noble women : I
Had learned no word of youth's discourse,
Nor gazed on games of warriors,
Nor trained a hound, nor ruled a horse.

"Besides, the daily life i' the sun
Made me at first hold back.
To thee this came at once ; to me
It crept with pauses timidly ;
I am not blithe and strong like thee.

"Yet my feet liked the dances well,
The songs went to my voice,
The music made me shake and weep ;
And often, all night long, my sleep
Gave dreams I had been fain to keep.

"But though I loved not holy things,
To hear them scorned brought pain,—
They were my childhood ; and these dames
Were merely perjured in saints' names
And fixed upon saints' days for games.

"And sometimes when my father rode
To hunt with his loud friends,
I dared not bring him to be quaff'd,
As my wont was, his stirrup-draught,
Because they jested so and laugh'd.

"At last one day my brothers said,
'The girl must not grow thus,—
Bring her a jennet,—she shall ride.'
They helped my mounting, and I tried
To laugh with them and keep their side.

"But breaks were rough and bents were steep
Upon our path that day :
My palfrey threw me ; and I went
Upon men's shoulders home, sore spent,
While the chase followed up the scent.

"Our shrift-father (and he alone
Of all the household there
Had skill in leechcraft,) was away
When I reached home. I tossed, and lay
Sullen with anguish the whole day.

"For the day passed ere some one brought
To mind that in the hunt
Rode a young lord she named, long bred
Among the priests, whose art (she said)
Might chance to stand me in much stead.

"I bade them seek and summon him :
But long ere this, the chase
Had scattered, and he was not found.
I lay in the same weary stound,
Therefore, until the night came round.

"It was dead night and near on twelve
When the horse-tramp at length
Beat up the echoes of the court :
By then, my feverish breath was short
With pain the sense could scarce support.

"My fond nurse sitting near my feet
Rose softly,—her lamp's flame
Held in her hand, lest it should make
My heated lids, in passing, ache ;
And she passed softly, for my sake.

"Returning soon, she brought the youth
They spoke of. Meek he seemed,
But good knights held him of stout heart.
He was akin to us in part,
And bore our shield, but barred athwart.

"I now remembered to have seen
His face, and heard him praised
For letter-lore and medicine,
Seeing his youth was nurtured in
Priests' knowledge, as mine own had been."

The bride's voice did not weaken here,
Yet by her sudden pause
She seemed to look for questioning ;
Or else (small need though) 'twas to bring
Well to her mind the bygone thing.

Her thought, long stagnant, stirred by speech,
Gave her a sick recoil ;
As, dip thy fingers though the green
That masks a pool,— where they have been
The naked depth is black between.

Amelotte kept her knees ; her face
Was shut within her hands,
As it had been throughout the tale ;
Her forehead's whiteness might avail
Nothing to say if she were pale.

Although the lattice had dropped loose,
There was no wind ; the heat
Being so at rest that Amelotte
Heard far beneath the plunge and float
Of a hound swimming in the moat.

Some minutes since, two rooks had toiled
Home to the nests that crowned
Ancestral ash-trees. Through the glare
Beating again, they seemed to tear
With that thick caw the woof o' the air.

But else, 'twas at the dead of noon
Absolute silence ; all,
From the raised bridge and guarded sconce
To green-clad places of pleasance
Where the long lake was white with swans.

Amelotte spoke not any word
Nor moved she once ; but felt
Between her hands in narrow space
Her own hot breath upon her face,
And kept in silence the same place.

Aloÿse did not hear at all

The sounds without. She heard
The inward voice (past help obey'd)
Which might not slacken nor be stay'd,
But urged her till the whole were said.

Therefore she spoke again : " That night

But little could be done :

My foot, held in my nurse's hands,
He swathed up heedfully in bands,
And for my rest gave close commands.

" I slept till noon, but an ill sleep

Of dreams : through all that day

My side was stiff and caught the breath ;

Next day, such pain as sickeneth

Took me, and I was nigh to death.

" Life strove, Death claimed me for his own

Through days and nights : but now

'Twas the good father tended me,

Having returned. Still I did see

The youth I spoke of constantly.

" For he would with my brothers come

To stay beside my couch,

And fix my eyes against his own,

Noting my pulse ; or else alone,

To sit at gaze while I made moan.

" (Some nights I knew he kept the watch,

Because my women laid

The rushes thick for his steel shoes.)

Through many days this pain did use

The life God would not let me lose.

" At length, with my good nurse to aid,

I could walk forth again :

And still, as one who broods or grieves,

At noons I'd meet him and at eves,

With idle feet that drove the leaves.

"The day when I first walked alone
Was thinned in grass and leaf,
And yet a goodly day o' the year :
The last bird's cry upon mine ear
Left my brain weak, it was so clear.

"The tears were sharp within mine eyes ;
I sat down, being glad,
And wept ; but stayed the sudden flow
Anon, for footsteps that fell slow ;
'Twas that youth passed me, bowing low.

"He passed me without speech ; but when,
At least an hour gone by,
Rethreading the same covert, he
Saw I was still beneath the tree,
He spoke and sat him down with me.

"Little we said ; nor one heart heard
Even what was said within ;
And, faltering some farewell, I soon
Rose up ; but then i' the autumn noon
My feeble brain whirled like a swoon.

"He made me sit. 'Cousin, I grieve
Your sickness stays by you.'
'I would,' said I, 'that you did err
So grieving. I am wearier
Than death, of the sickening dying year.'

"He answered : 'If your weariness
Accepts a remedy,
I hold one and can give it you.'
I gazed : 'What ministers thereto,
Be sure,' I said, 'that I will do.'

"He went on quickly : — 'Twas a cure
He had not ever named
Unto our kin, lest they should stint
Their favor, for some foolish hint
Of wizardry or magic in't :

* But that if he were let to come
 Within my bower that night,
(My women still attending me,
He said, while he remain'd there,) he
Could teach me the cure privily.

"I bade him come that night. He came ;
 But little in his speech
Was cure or sickness spoken of,
Only a passionate fierce love
That clamored upon God above.

"My women wondered, leaning close
 Aloof. At mine own heart
I think great wonder was not stirr'd.
I dared not listen, yet I heard
His tangled speech, word within word.

"He craved my pardon first,—all else
 Wild tumult. In the end
He remained silent at my feet
Fumbling the rushes. Strange quick heat
Made all the blood of my life meet.

"And lo ! I loved him. I but said,
 If he would leave me then,
His hope some future might forecast.
His hot lips stung my hand : at last
My damsels led him forth in haste."

The bride took breath to pause ; and turned
 Her gaze where Amelotte
Knelt,—the gold hair upon her back
Quite still in all its threads,—the track
Of her still shadow sharp and black.

That listening without sight had grown
 To stealthy dread ; and now
That the one sound she had to mark
Left her alone too, she was stark
Afraid, as children in the dark.

Her fingers felt her temples beat ;
Then came that brain-sickness
Which thinks to scream, and murmureth ;
And pent between her hands, the breath
Was damp against her face like death.

Her arms both fell at once ; but when
She gasped upon the light,
Her sense returned. She would have pray'd
To change whatever words still stay'd
Behind, but felt there was no aid.

So she rose up, and having gone
Within the window's arch
Once more, she sat there, all intent
On torturing doubts, and once more bent
To hear, in mute bewilderment.

But Aloyse still paused. Thereon
Amelotte gathered voice
In somewise from the torpid fear
Coiled round her spirit. Low but clear
She said : "Speak, sister ; for I hear."

But Aloyse threw up her neck
And called the name of God : —
"Judge, God, 'twixt her and me to-day !
She knows how hard this is to say,
Yet will not have one word away."

Her sister was quite silent. Then
Afresh : — "Not she, dear Lord !
Thou be my judge, on Thee I call !"
She ceased, — her forehead smote the wall
"Is there a God," she said, "at all ?"

Amelotte shuddered at the soul,
But did not speak. The pause
Was long this time. At length the bride
Pressed her hand hard against her side,
And trembling between shame and pride

Said by fierce effort : "From that night
Often at nights we met :
That night, his passion could but rave;
The next, what grace his lips did crave
I knew not, but I know I gave."

Where Amelotte was sitting, all
The light and warmth of day
Were so upon her without shade,
That the thing seemed by sunshine made
Most foul and wanton to be said.

She would have questioned more, and known
The whole truth at its worst,
But held her silent, in mere shame
Of day. 'Twas only these words came :—
"Sister, thou hast not said his name."

"Sister," quoth Aloÿse, "thou know'st
His name. I said that he
Was in a manner of our kin.
Waiting the title he might win,
They called him the Lord Urscelyn."

The bridegroom's name, to Amelotte
Daily familiar,— heard
Thus in this dreadful history,—
Was dreadful to her ; as might be
Thine own voice speaking unto thee.

The day's mid-hour was almost full ;
Upon the dial-plate
The angel's sword stood near at One.
An hour's remaining yet ; the sun
Will not decrease till all be done.

Through the bride's lattice there crept in
At whiles (from where the train
Of minstrels, till the marriage-call,
Loitered at windows of the wall,)
Stray lute-notes, sweet and musical.

They clung in the green growths and moss
Against the outside stone ;
Low like dirge-wail or requiem
They murmured, lost 'twixt leaf and stem :
There was no wind to carry them.

Amelotte gathered herself back
Into the wide recess
That the sun flooded : it o'erspread
Like flame the hair upon her head
And fringed her face with burning red.

All things seemed shaken and at change :
A silent place o' the hills
She knew, into her spirit came :
Within herself she said its name
And wondered was it still the same.

The bride (whom silence goaded) now
Said strongly,— her despair
By stubborn will kept underneath : —
“ Sister, 'twere well thou didst not breathe
That curse of thine. Give me my wreath.”

“ Sister,” said Amelotte, “ abide
In peace. Be God thy judge,
As thou hast said — not I. For me,
I merely will thank God that he
Whom thou hast lovèd loveth thee.”

Then Aloÿse lay back, and laughed
With wan lips bitterly,
Saying, “ Nay, thank thou God for this,—
That never any soul like his
Shall have its portion where love is.”

Weary of wonder, Amelotte
Sat silent : she would ask
No more, though all was unexplained :
She was too weak ; the ache still pained
Her eyes,— her forehead's pulse remained

The silence lengthened. Aloyse
Was fain to turn her face
Apart, to where the arras told
Two Testaments, the New and Old
In shapes and meanings manifold.

One solace that was gained, she hid.
Her sister, from whose curse
Her heart recoiled, had blessed instead :
Yet would not her pride have it said
How much the blessing comforted.

Only, on looking round again
After some while, the face
Which from the arras turned away
Was more at peace and less at bay
With shame than it had been that day.

She spoke right on, as if no pause
Had come between her speech :
"That year from warmth grew bleak and pass'd ;"
She said ; "the days from first'to last
How slow,— woe's me ! the nights how fast !"

"From first to last it was not known :
My nurse, and of my train
Some four or five, alone could tell
What terror kept inscrutable :
There was good need to guard it well.

"Not the guilt only made the shame,
But he was without land
And born amiss. He had but come
To train his youth here at our home
And, being man, depart therefrom.

"Of the whole time each single day
Brought fear and great unrest :
It seemed that all would not avail
Some once,— that my close watch would fail,
And some sign, somehow, tell the tale.

"The noble maidens that I knew,
My fellows, oftentimes
Midway in talk or sport, would look
A wonder which my fears mistook,
To see how I turned faint and shook.

"They had a game of cards, where each
By painted arms might find
What knight she should be given to.
Ever with trembling hand I threw
Lest I should learn the thing I knew.

"And once it came. And Aure d'Honvaux
Held up the bended shield
And laughed : ' Gramercy for our share ! —
If to our bridal we but fare
To smutch the blazon that we bear ! '

"But proud Denise de Villenbois
Kissed me, and gave her wench
The card and said : ' If in these bowers
You women play at paramours,
You must not mix your game with ours.'

"And one upcast it from her hand :
' Lo ! see how high he'll soar ! '
But then their laugh was bitterest ;
For the wind veered at fate's behest
And blew it back into my breast.

"Oh ! if I met him in the day
Or heard his voice,— at meals
Or at the Mass or through the hall,—
A look turned towards me would appall
My heart by seeming to know all.

"Yet I grew curious of my shame,
And sometimes in the church,
On hearing such a sin rebuked,
Have held my girdle-glass unhooked
To see how such a woman looked.

But if at night he did not come,
I lay all deadly cold
To think they might have smitten sore
And slain him, and as the night wore,
His corpse be lying at my door.

“And entering or going forth,
Our proud shield o’er the gate
Seemed to arraign my shrinking eyes.
With tremors and unspoken lies
The year went past me in this wise.

“About the spring of the next year
An ailing fell on me ;
(I had been stronger till the spring ;)
’Twas mine old sickness gathering,
I thought ; but ’twas another thing.

“I had such yearnings as brought tears,
And a wan dizziness :
Motion, like feeling, grew intense ;
Sight was a haunting evidence
And sound a pang that snatched the sense

“It now was hard on that great ill
Which lost our wealth from us
And all our lands. Accursed be
The peevish fools of liberty
Who will not let themselves be free !

“The prince was fled into the west :
A price was on his blood,
But he was safe. To us his friends
He left that ruin which attends
The strife against God’s secret ends.

“The league dropped all asunder,— Lord,
Gentle and serf. Our house
Was marked to fall. And a day came
When half the wealth that propped our name
Went from us in a wind of flame.

"Six hours I lay upon the wall
And saw it burn. But when
It clogged the day in a black bed
Of louring vapor, I was led
Down to the postern, and we fled.

"But ere we fled, there was a voice
Which I heard speak, and say
That many of our friends, to shun
Our fate, had left us and were gone,
And that Lord Urscelyn was one.

"That name, as was its wont, made sight
And hearing whirl. I gave
No heed but only to the name.
I held my senses, dreading them,
And was at strife to look the same.

"We rode and rode. As the speed grew,
The growth of some vague curse
Swarmed in my brain. It seemed to me
Numbed by the swiftness, but would be —
That still — clear knowledge certainly.

"Night lapsed. At dawn the sea was there
And the sea-wind : afar
The ravening surge was hoarse and loud,
And underneath the dim dawn-cloud
Each stalking wave shook like a shroud.

"From my drawn litter I looked out
Unto the swarthy sea,
And knew. That voice, which late had cross'd
Mine ears, seemed with the foam uptoss'd :
I knew that Urscelyn was lost.

"Then I spake all : I turned on one
And on the other, and spake :
My curse laughed in me to behold
Their eyes : I sat up, stricken cold,
Mad of my voice till all was told.

“Oh ! of my brothers, Hugues was mute,
And Gilles was wild and loud,
And Raoul strained abroad his face,
As if his gnashing wrath could trace
Even there the prey that it must chase.

“And round me murmured all our train,
Hoarse as the hoarse-tongued sea ;
Till Hugues from silence louting woke,
And cried : “What ails the foolish folk ?
Know ye not frenzy’s lightning-stroke ? ”

“But my stern father came to them
And quelled them with his look,
Silent and deadly pale. Anon
I knew that we were hastening on,
My litter closed and the light gone.

“And I remember all that day
The barren bitter wind
Without, and the sea’s moaning there
That I first moaned with unaware,
And when I knew, shook down my hair.

“Few followed us or faced our flight :
Once only I could hear,
Far in the front, loud scornful words,
And cries I knew of hostile lords,
And crash of spears and grind of sword.

“It was soon ended. On that day
Before the light had changed
We reached our refuge ; miles of rock
Bulwarked for war ; whose strength might mock
Sky, sea, or man, to storm or shock.

“Listless and feebly conscious, I
Lay far within the night
Awake. The many pains incurred
That day,—the whole, said, seen or heard,—
Stayed by in me as things deferred.

"Not long. At dawn I slept. In dreams
All was passed through afresh
From end to end. As the morn heaved
Towards noon, I, waking sore aggrieved,
That I might die, cursed God, and lived.

"Many days went, and I saw none
Except my women. They
Calmed their wan faces, loving me ;
And when they wept, lest I should see,
Would chant a desolate melody.

"Panic unthreatened shook my blood
Each sunset, all the slow
Subsiding of the turbid light.
I would rise, sister, as I might,
And bathe my forehead through the night

"To elude madness. The stark walls
Made chill the mirk : and when
We oped our curtains, to resume
Sun-sickness after long sick gloom,
The withering sea-wind walked the room.

"Through the gaunt windows the great gales
Bore in the tattered clumps
Of waif-weed and the tamarisk-boughs ;
And sea-mews, 'mid the storm's carouse,
Were flung, wild-clamoring, in the house.

"My hounds I had not ; and my hawk,
Which they had saved for me,
Wanting the sun and rain to beat
His wings, soon lay with gathered feet ;
And my flowers faded, lacking heat.

"Such still were griefs : for grief was still
A separate sense, untouched
Of that despair which had become
My life. Great anguish could benumb
My soul,—my heart was quarrelsome.

"Time crept. Upon a day at length
My kinsfolk sat with me :
That which they asked was bare and plain :
I answered : the whole bitter strain
Was again said, and heard again.

"Fierce Raoul snatched his sword, and turned
The point against my breast.
I bared it, smiling : ' To the heart
Strike home,' I said ; ' another dart
Wreaks hourly there a deadlier smart.'

"'Twas then my sire struck down the sword,
And said with shaken lips :
' She from whom all of you receive
Your life, so smiled ; and I forgive.'
Thus, for my mother's sake, I live.

"But I, a mother even as she,
Turned shuddering to the wall :
For I said : ' Great God ! and what would I do,
When to the sword, with the thing I knew,
I offered not one life but two ! '

"Then I fell back from them, and lay
Outwearied. My tired sense
Soon filmed and settled, and like stone
I slept ; till something made me moan,
And I woke up at night alone.

"I woke at midnight, cold and dazed ;
Because I found myself
Seated upright, with bosom bare,
Upon my bed, combing my hair,
Ready to go, I knew not where.

"It dawned light day,— the last of those
Long months of longing days.
That noon, the change was wrought on me
In somewise,— naught to hear or see,—
Only a trance and agony."

The bride's voice failed her, from no will
To pause. The bridesmaid leaned,
And where the window-panes were white,
Looked for the day : she knew not quite
If there were either day or night.

It seemed to Aloÿse that the whole
Day's weight lay back on her
Like lead. The hours that did remain
Beat their dry wings upon her brain
Once in mid-flight, and passed again.

There hung a cage of burnt perfumes
In the recess : but these,
For some hours, weak against the sun,
Had simmered in white ash. From One
The second quarter was begun.

They had not heard the stroke. The air,
Though altered with no wind,
Breathed now by pauses, so to say :
Each breath was time that went away,—
Each pause a minute of the day.

P the almonry, the almoner,
Hard by, had just dispensed
Church-dole and march-dole. High and wide
Now rose the shout of thanks, which cried
On God that He should bless the bride.

Its echo thrilled within their feet,
And in the furthest rooms
Was heard, where maidens flushed and gay
Wove with stooped necks the wreaths alway
Fair for the virgin's marriage-day.

The mother leaned along, in thought
After her child ; till tears,
Bitter, not like the wedded girl's,
Fell down her breast along her curls,
And ran in the close work of pearls.

The speech ached at her heart. She said :

“Sweet Mary, do thou plead
This hour with thy most blessed Son
To let these shameful words atone,
That I may die when I have done.”

The thought ached at her soul. Yet now :—

“Itself — that life” (she said,)
“Out of my weary life — when sense
Unclosed, was gone. What evil men’s
Most evil hands had borne it thence

“I knew, and cursed them. Still in sleep
I have my child ; and pray
To know if it indeed appear
As in my dream’s perpetual sphere,
That I — death reached — may seek it there.

“Sleeping, I wept ; though until dark
A fever dried mine eyes
Kept open ; save when a tear might
Be forced from the mere ache of sight.
And I nursed hatred day and night.

“Ay, and I sought revenge by spells ;
And vainly many a time
Have laid my face into the lap
Of a wise woman, and heard clap
Her thunder, the fiend’s juggling trap.

“At length I feared to curse them, lest
From evil lips the curse
Should be a blessing ; and would sit
Rocking myself and stifling it
With babbled jargon of no wit.

“But this was not at first : the days
And weeks made frenzied months
Before this came. My curses, pil’d
Then with each hour unreconcil’d,
Still wait for those who took my child.”

She stopped, grown fainter. "Amelotte,
Surely," she said, "this sun
Sheds judgment-fire from the fierce south :
It does not let me breathe : the drouth
Is like sand spread within my mouth."

The bridesmaid rose. I' the outer glare
Gleamed her pale cheeks, and eyes
Sore troubled ; and aweary weigh'd
Her brows just lifted out of shade ;
And the light jarred within her head.

'Mid flowers fair heaped there stood a bowl
With water. She therein
Through eddying bubbles slid a cup,
And offered it, being risen up,
Close to her sister's mouth, to sup.

The freshness dwelt upon her sense,
Yet did not the bride drink ;
But she dipped in her hand anon
And cooled her temples ; and all wan
With lids that held their ache, went on

"Through those dark watches of my woe,
Time, an ill plant, had waxed
Apace. That year was finished. Dumb
And blind, life's wheel with earth's had come
Whirled round : and we might seek our home

"Our wealth was rendered back, with wealth
Snatched from our foes. The house
Had more than its old strength and fame :
But still 'neath the fair outward claim
I rankled,— a fierce core of shame.

"It chilled me from their eyes and lips
Upon a night of those
First days of triumph, as I gazed
Listless and sick, or scarcely raised
My face to mark the sports they praised.

"The endless changes of the dance
 Bewildered me : the tones
Of lute and cithern struggled tow'rd
Some sense ; and still in the last chords
The music seemed to sing wild words.

"My shame possessed me in the light
 And pageant, till I swooned.
But from that hour I put my shame
From me, and cast it over them
By God's command and in God's name

"For my child's bitter sake. O thou
 Once felt against my heart
With longing of the eyes,— a pain
Since to my heart for ever,— then
Beheld not, and not felt again !"

She scarcely paused, continuing : —
 " That year drooped weak in March ;
And April, finding the streams dry,
Choked, with no rain, in dust : the sky
Shall not be fainter this July.

"Men sickened ; beasts lay without strength ;
 The year died in the land.
But I, already desolate,
Said merely, sitting down to wait,—
'The seasons change and Time wears late.'

"For I had my hard secret told,
 In secret, to a priest ;
With him I communed ; and he said
The world's soul, for its sins, was sped,
And the sun's courses numberèd.

"The year slid like a corpse afloat :
 None trafficked,— who had bread
Did eat. That year our legions, come
Thinned from the place of war, at home
Found busier death, more burdensome.

“Tidings and rumors came with them,
The first for months. The chiefs
Sat daily at our board, and in
Their speech were names of friend and kin :
One day they spoke of Urseelyn.

“The words were light, among the rest ;
Quick glance my brothers sent
To sift the speech ; and I, struck through,
Sat sick and giddy in full view :
Yet did not gaze, so many knew.

“Because in the beginning, much
Had caught abroad, through them
That heard my clamor on the coast :
But two were hanged ; and then the **most**
Held silence wisdom, as thou know'st.

“That year the convent yielded thee
Back to our home ; and thou
Then knew'st not how I shuddered cold
To kiss thee, seeming to enfold
To my changed heart myself of old.

“Then there was showing thee the house,
So many rooms and doors ;
Thinking the while how thou would'st **start**
If once I flung the doors apart
Of one dull chamber in my heart.

“And yet I longed to open it ;
And often in that year
Of plague and want, when side by side
We've knelt to pray with them that died,
My prayer was, ‘ Show her what I hide ! ’ ”

THREE TRANSLATIONS FROM FRANÇOIS VILLON, 1450.

I.

THE BALLAD OF DEAD LADIES.

TELL me now in what hidden way is
 Lady Flora the lovely Roman?
 Where's Hipparchia, and where is Thais,
 Neither of them the fairer woman?
 Where is Echo, beheld of no man,
 Only heard on river and mere,—
 She whose beauty was more than human? . . .
 But where are the snows of yester-year?

Where's Héloïse, the learned nun,
 For whose sake Abeillard, I ween,
 Lost manhood and put priesthood on?
 (From Love he won such dule and teen !)
 And where, I pray you, is the Queen
 Who willed that Buridan should steer
 Sewed in a sack's mouth down the Seine? . . .
 But where are the snows of yester-year?

White Queen Blanche, like a queen of lilies,
 With a voice like any mermaiden,—
 Bertha Broadfoot, Beatrice, Alice,
 And Ermengarde the lady of Maine,—
 And that good Joan whom Englishmen
 At Rouen doomed and burned her there,—
 Mother of God, where are they then? . . .
 But where are the snows of yester-year?

Nay, never ask this week, fair lord,
 Where they are gone, nor yet this year,
 Except with this for an overword,—
 But where are the snows of yester-year?

II.

TO DEATH, OF HIS LADY.

DEATH, of thee do I make my moan,
 Who hadst my lady away from me,
 Nor wilt assuage thine enmity
 Till with her life thou hast mine own ;
 For since that hour my strength has flown.
 Lo ! what wrong was her life to thee,
 Death ?

Two we were, and the heart was one ;
 Which now being dead, dead I must be,
 Or seem alive as lifelessly
 As in the choir the painted stone,
 Death !

III.

HIS MOTHER'S SERVICE TO OUR LADY.

LADY of Heaven and earth, and therewithal
 Crowned Empress of the nether clefts of Hell,—
 I, thy poor Christian, on thy name do call,
 Commending me to thee, with thee to dwell,
 Albeit in naught I be commendable.
 But all mine undeserving may not mar
 Such mercies as thy sovereign mercies are ;
 Without the which (as true words testify)
 No soul can reach thy Heaven so fair and far.
 Even in this faith I choose to live and die.

Unto thy Son say thou that I am His,
 And to me graceless make Him gracious.
 Sad Mary of Egypt lacked not of that bliss,
 Nor yet the sorrowful clerk Theophilus,
 Whose bitter sins were set aside even thus
 Though to the Fiend his bounden service was.
 Oh help me, lest in vain for me should pass
 (Sweet Virgin that shalt have no loss thereby !)
 The blessed Host and sacring of the Mass.
 Even in this faith I choose to live and die.

A pitiful poor woman, shrunk and old,
 I am, and nothing learn'd in letter-lore.
 Within my parish-cloister I behold
 A painted Heaven where harps and lutes adore,
 And eke an Hell whose damned folk see the full sore
 One bringeth fear, the other joy to me.
 That joy, great Goddess, make thou mine to be,—
 Thou of whom all must ask it even as I;
 And that which faith desires, that let it see.
 For in this faith I choose to live and die.

O excellent Virgin Princess! thou didst bear
 King Jesus, the most excellent comforter,
 Who even of this our weakness craved a share
 And for our sake stooped to us from on high,
 Offering to death His young life sweet and fair.
 Such as He is, Our Lord, I Him declare,
 And in this faith I choose to live and die.

JOHN OF TOURS.

(*Old French.*)

JOHN of Tours is back with peace,
 But he comes home ill at ease.

“Good-morrow, mother.” “Good-morrow, son,
 Your wife has borne you a little one.”

“Go now, mother, go before,
 Make me a bed upon the floor ;

“Very low your foot must fall,
 That my wife hear not at all.”

As it neared the midnight toll,
 John of Tours gave up his soul.

"Tell me now, my mother my dear,
What's the crying that I hear?"

"Daughter, it's the children wake
Crying with their teeth that ache."

"Tell me though, my mother my dear,
What's the knocking that I hear?"

"Daughter, it's the carpenter
Mending planks upon the stair."

"Tell me too, my mother my dear,
What's the singing that I hear?"

"Daughter, it's the priests in rows
Going round about our house."

"Tell me then, my mother my dear,
What's the dress that I should wear?"

"Daughter, any reds or blues,
But the black is most in use."

"Nay, but say, my mother my dear,
Why do you fall weeping here?"

"Oh! the truth must be said,—
It's that John of Tours is dead."

"Mother, let the sexton know
That the grave must be for two ;

"Ay, and still have room to spare,
For you must shut the baby there."

MY FATHER'S CLOSE.

(*Old French.*)

INSIDE my father's close,
(Fly away O my heart away !)
Sweet apple-blossom blows
So sweet.

Three kings' daughters fair,
(Fly away O my heart away !)
They lie below it there
So sweet.

" Ah ! " says the eldest one,
(Fly away O my heart away !)
" I think the day's begun
So sweet."

" Ah ! " says the second one,
(Fly away O my heart away !)
" Far off I hear the drum
So sweet."

" Ah ! " says the youngest one,
(Fly away O my heart away !)
" It's my true love, my own,
So sweet.

" Oh ! if he fight and win."
(Fly away O my heart away !)
" I keep my love for him,
So sweet :
He hath it still complete."

BEAUTY.

(A combination from Sappho.)

I.

LIKE the sweet apple which reddens upon the top
 most bough,
 A-top on the topmost twig,— which the pluckers for-
 got, somehow,—
 Forgot it not, nay, but got it not, for none could get
 it till now.

II.

Like the wild hyacinth flower which on the hills is
 found,
 Which the passing feet of the shepherds for ever tear
 and wound,
 Until the purple blossom is trodden into the ground.

YOUTH AND LORDSHIP.*

(Italian Street-Song.)

MY young lord's the lover
 Of earth and sky above,
 Of youth's sway and youth's play,
 Of songs and flowers and love.

* GIOVENTÙ E SIGNORIA.

È GIOVINE il signore,
 Ed ama molte cose,—
 I canti, le rose,
 La forza e l'amore.

Ahi più che il sole,
 Più ch' ogni rosa,
 La cara cosa,
 Donna a gioire.

Quel che più vuole
 Ancor non osa :

È giovine il signore,
 Ed ama quelle cose

Yet for love's desire
 Green youth lacks the daring ;
 Though one dream of fire,
 All his hours ensnaring,
 Burns the boy past bearing,—
 The dream that girls inspire.

My young lord's the lover
 Of every burning thought
 That Love's will, that Love's skill
 Within his breast has wrought.

Lovely girl, look on him
 Soft as music's measure ;
 Yield him, when you've won him,
 Joys and toys at pleasure ;
 But to win your treasure,
 Softly look upon him.

My young lord's the lover
 Of every tender grace
 That woman, to woo man,
 Can wear in form or face.

Che ardor dispose
 In cuore all' amore.

Bella fanciulla,
 Guardalo in viso ;
 Men mancar nulla,
 Motto o sorriso ;
 Ma viso a viso
 Guarda a gradire.

È giovine il signore,
 Ed ama tutte cose,
 Vezzose, gioiose,
 Tenenti all' amore.

Prendilo in braccio
 Adesso o mai ;
 Per più mi taccio,
 Chè tu lo sai ;

Bacialo e l'avrai,
 Ma non lo dire.

È giovine il signore,
 Ed ama ben le cose
 Che Amor nascose,
 Che mostragli Amore.

Deh trionfando
 Non farne pruova ;
 Ahimè ! che quando
 Gioja più giova,
 Allor si trova
 Presso al finire.

È giovine il signore,
 Ed ama tante cose,
 Le rose, le spose,
 Quante gli dona Amore.

Take him to your bosom
 Now, girl, or never ;
 Let not your new blossom
 Of sweet kisses sever .
 Only guard for ever
 Your boast within your bosom.

My young lord's the lover
 Of every secret thing,
 Love-hidden, love-bidden
 This day to banqueting.

Lovely girl, with vaunting
 Never tempt to-morrow :
 From all shapes enchanting
 Any joy can borrow,
 Still the specter Sorrow
 Rises up for haunting.

And now my lord's the lover
 Of ah ! so many a sweet,—
 Of roses, of spouses,
 As many as love may greet.



THE LEAF.

(*Leopardi.*)

"TORN from your parent bough,
 Poor leaf all withered now,
 Where go you ?" " I cannot tell
 Storm-stricken is the oak-tree
 Where I grew, whence I fell.
 Changeful continually,
 The zephyr and hurricane
 Since that day bid me flee
 From deepest woods to the lea,

From highest hills to the plain.
 Where the wind carries me
 I go without fear or grief :
 I go whither each one goes,—
 Thither the leaf of the rose
 And thither the laurel-leaf."

FRANCESCA DA RIMINI.

(Dante.)

* * * * * *

When I made answer, I began : " Alas !

How many sweet thoughts and how much desire
 Led these two onward to the dolorous pass ! "

Then turned to them, as who would fain inquire,
 And said : " Francesca, these thine agonies

Wring tears for pity and grief that they inspire :
 But tell me,— in the season of sweet sighs,

When and what way did Love instruct you so
 That he in your vague longings made you wise ? "

Then she to me : " There is no greater woe
 Than the remembrance brings of happy days

In Misery ; and this thy guide doth know.
 But if the first beginnings to retrace

Of our sad love can yield thee solace here,
 So will I be as one that weeps and says.

One day we read, for pastime and sweet cheer,
 Of Lancelot, how he found Love tyrannous :

We were alone and without any fear.
 Our eyes were drawn together, reading thus,
 Full oft, and still our cheeks would pale and glow ;
 But one sole point it was that conquered us.

For when we read of that great lover, how
 He kissed the smile which he had longed to win,—
 Then he whom naught can sever from me now

For ever, kissed my mouth, all quivering.

A Galahalt was the book, and he that writ :
Upon that day we read no more therein."

At the tale told, while one soul uttered it,
The other wept : a pang so pitiable

That I was seized, like death, in swooning-fit,
And even as a dead body falls, I fell.

LOVE-LILY.

BETWEEN the hands, between the brows,
Between the lips of Love-Lily,
A spirit is born whose birth endows
My blood with fire to burn through me ;
Who breathes upon my gazing eyes,
Who laughs and murmurs in mine ear,
At whose least touch my color flies,
And whom my life grows faint to hear.

Within the voice, within the heart,
Within the mind of Love-Lily,
A spirit is born who lifts apart
His tremulous wings and looks at me ;
Who on my mouth his finger lays,
And shows, while whispering lutes confer,
That Eden of Love's watered ways
Whose winds and spirits worship her.

Brows, hands, and lips, heart, mind, and voice,
Kisses and words of Love-Lily,—
Oh ! bid me with your joy rejoice
Till riotous longing rest in me !
Ah ! let not hope be still distraught,
But find in her its gracious goal,
Whose speech Truth knows not from her thought
Nor Love her body from her soul.

FIRST LOVE REMEMBERED.

PEACE in her chamber, wheresoe'er
It be, a holy place :
The thought still brings my soul such grace
As morning meadows wear.

Whether it still be small and light,
A maid's who dreams alone,
As from her orchard gate the moon
Its ceiling showed at night :

Or whether, in a shadow dense
As nuptial hymns invoke,
Innocent maidenhood awoke
To married innocence :

There still the thanks unheard await
The unconscious gift bequeathed ;
For there my soul this hour has breathed,
An air inviolate.

PLIGHTED PROMISE.

IN a soft-complexioned sky,
Fleeting rose and kindling gray,
Have you seen Aurora fly
At the break of day ?
So my maiden, so my plighted may
Blushing cheek and gleaming eye
Lifts to look my way.

Where the inmost leaf is stirred
With the heart-beat of the grove,
Have you heard a hidden bird
Cast her note above ?

So my lady, so my lovely love,
Echoing Cupid's prompted word,
Makes a tune thereof.

Have you seen, at heaven's mid-height,
In the moon-rack's ebb and tide,
Venus leap forth burning white,
Dian pale and hide?
So my bright breast-jewel, so my bride,
One sweet night, when fear takes flight,
Shall leap against my side.

SUDDEN LIGHT.

I HAVE been here before,
But when or how I cannot tell :
I know the grass beyond the door,
The sweet keen smell,
The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.

You have been mine before,—
How long ago I may not know :
But just when at that swallow's soar
Your neck turned so,
Some veil did fall,— I knew it all of yore.

Has this been thus before ?
And shall not thus time's eddying flight
Still with our lives our loves restore
In death's despite,
And day and night yield one delight once more ?

A LITTLE WHILE.

A LITTLE while a little love
The hour yet bears for thee and me
Who have not drawn the veil to see
If still our heaven be lit above.
Thou merely, at the day's last sigh,
Hast felt thy soul prolong the tone ;
And I have heard the night-wind cry
And deemed its speech mine own.

A little while a little love
The scattering autumn hoards for us
Whose bower is not yet ruinous
Nor quite unieaved our songless grove.
Only across the shaken boughs
We hear the flood-tides seek the sea,
And deep in both our hearts they rouse
One wail for thee and me.

A little while a little love
May yet be ours who have not said
The word it makes our eyes afraid
To know that each is thinking of.
Not yet the end : be our lips dumb
In smiles a little season yet :
I'll tell thee, when the end is come,
How we may best forget.

THE SONG OF THE BOWER.

SAY, is it day, is it dusk in thy bower,
 Thou whom I long for, who longest for me?
 Oh! be it light, be it night, 'tis Love's hour,
 Love's that is fettered as Love's that is free.
 Free Love has leaped to that innermost chamber,
 Oh! the last time, and the hundred before:
 Fettered Love, motionless, can but remember,
 Yet something that sighs from him passes the door.

Nay, but my heart when it flies to thy bower,
 What does it find there that knows it again?
 There it must droop like a shower-beaten flower,
 Red at the rent core and dark with the rain.
 Ah! yet what shelter is still shed above it,—
 What waters still image its leaves torn apart?
 Thy soul is the shade that clings round it to love it.
 And tears are its mirror deep down in thy heart.

What were my prize, could I enter thy bower,
 This day, to-morrow, at eve or at morn?
 Large lovely arms and a neck like a tower,
 Bosom then heaving that now lies forlorn.
 Kindled with love-breath, (the sun's kiss is colder!)
 Thy sweetness all near me, so distant to-day;
 My hand round thy neck and thy hand on my shoulder,
 My mouth to thy mouth as the world melts away

What is it keeps me afar from thy bower,—
 My spirit, my body, so fain to be there?
 Waters engulfing or fires that devour?—
 Earth heaped against me or death in the air?
 Nay, but in day-dreams, for terror, for pity,
 The trees wave their heads with an omen to tell;
 Nay, but in night-dreams, throughout the dark city,
 The hours clashed together, lose count in the bell.

Shall I not one day remember thy bower,
One day when all days are one day to me? —
Thinking, "I stirred not, and yet had the power,"
Yearning, "Ah God, if again it might be!"
Peace, peace! such a small lamp illumes, on this high-
way,
So dimly so few steps in front of my feet,—
Yet shows me that her way is parted from my way. . .
Out of sight, beyond light, at what goal may we
meet?

PENUMBRA.

I DID not look upon her eyes,
(Though scarcely seen, with no surprise,
'Mid many eyes a single look,)
Because they should not gaze rebuke,
At night, from stars in sky and brook.

I did not take her by the hand,
(Though little was to understand
From touch of hand all friends might take,)
Because it should not prove a flake
Burnt in my palm to boil and ache.

I did not listen to her voice,
(Though none had noted, where at choice
All might rejoice in listening,)
Because no such a thing should cling
In the wood's moan at evening.

I did not cross her shadow once,
(Though from the hollow west the sun's
Last shadow runs along so far,)
Because in June it should not bar
My ways, at noon when fevers are.

They told me she was sad that day.
(Though wherefore tell what love's soothsay,
Sooner than they, did register ?)
And my heart leapt and wept to her,
And yet I did not speak nor stir.

So shall the tongues of the sea's foam
(Though many voices therewith come
From drowned hope's home to cry to me,)
Bewail one hour the more, when sea
And wind are one with memory.

THE WOODSPURGE.

THE wind flapped loose, the wind was still,
Shaken out dead from tree and hill :
I had walked on at the wind's will,—
I sat now, for the wind was still.

Between my knees my forehead was,—
My lips, drawn in, said not Alas !
My hair was over in the grass,
My naked ears heard the day pass.

My eyes, wide open, had the run
Of some ten weeds to fix upon ;
Among those few, out of the sun,
The woodspurge flowered, three cups in one.

From perfect grief there need not be
Wisdom or even memory :
One thing then learnt remains to me,—
The woodspurge has a cup of three.

THE HONEYSUCKLE.

I PLUCKED a honeysuckle where
The hedge on high is quick with thorn,
And climbing for the prize, was torn,
And fouled my feet in quag-water ;
And by the thorns and by the wind
The blossom that I took was thinn'd,
And yet I found it sweet and fair.

Thence to a richer growth I came,
Where, nursed in mellow intercourse,
The honeysuckles sprang by scores,
Not harried like my single stem,
All virgin lamps of scent and dew.
So from my hand that first I threw,
Yet plucked not any more of them.

A YOUNG FIR-WOOD.

THESE little firs to-day are things
To clasp into a giant's cap,
Or fans to suit his lady's lap.
From many winters many springs
Shall cherish them in strength and sap,
Till they be marked upon the map,
A wood for the wind's wanderings.

All seed is in the sower's hands :
And what at first was trained to spread
Its shelter for some single head,—
Yea, even such fellowship of wands,—
May hide the sunset, and the shade
Of its great multitude be laid
Upon the earth and elder sands.

THE SEA-LIMITS.

CONSIDER the sea's listless chime :
Time's self it is, made audible,—
The murmur of the earth's own shell.
Secret continuance sublime
Is the sea's end : our sight may pass
No furlong further. Since time was,
This sound hath told the lapse of time.

No quiet, which is death's,— it hath
The mournfulness of ancient life,
Enduring always at dull strife.
As the world's heart of rest and wrath,
Its painful pulse is in the sands.
Last utterly, the whole sky stands,
Gray and not known, along its path.

Listen alone beside the sea,
Listen alone among the woods ;
Those voices of twin solitudes
Shall have one sound alike to thee :
Hark where the murmurs of thronged men
Surge and sink back and surge again,—
Still the one voice of wave and tree.

Gather a shell from the strown beach
And listen at its lips : they sigh
The same desire and mystery,
The echo of the whole sea's speech.
And all mankind is thus at heart
Not anything but what thou art :
And Earth, Sea, Man, are all in each.

FOR

"RUGGIERO AND ANGELICA."

BY INGRES.

(Two Sonnets.)

I.

A REMOTE sky, prolonged to the sea's brim :
 One rock-point standing buffeted alone,
 Vexed at its base with a foul beast unknown,
 Hell-birth of geomaunt and teraphim :
 A knight, and a winged creature bearing him,
 Reared at the rock : a woman fettered there,
 Leaning into the hollow with loose hair
 And throat let back and heartsick trail of limb.

The sky is harsh, and the sea shrewd and salt :
 Under his lord the griffin-horse ramps blind
 With rigid wings and tail. The spear's lithe stem
 Thrills in the roaring of those jaws : behind,
 That evil length of body chafes at fault.
 She doth not hear nor see — she knows of them.

II.

Clench thine eyes now,— 'tis the last instant, girl :
 Draw in thy senses, set thy knees, and take
 One breath for all : thy life is keen awake,—
 Thou mayst not swoon. Was that the scattered whirl
 Of its foam drenched thee ? — or the waves that curl
 And split, bleak spray wherein thy temples ache ?
 Or was it his the champion's blood to flake
 Thy flesh ? — or thine own blood's anointing, girl ?
 Now, silence : for the sea's is such a sound
 As irks not silence ; and except the sea,
 All now is still. Now the dead thing doth cease
 To writhe, and drifts. He turns to her : and she,
 Cast from the jaws of Death, remains there, bound,
 Again a woman in her nakedness.

FOR

"THE WINE OF CIRCE."

BY EDWARD BURNE JONES.

DUSK-HAIRED and gold-robed o'er the golden wine
She stoops, wherein, distilled of death and shame,
Sink the black drops ; while, lit with fragrant flame,
Round her spread board the golden sunflowers shine.
Doth Helios here with Hecate combine
(O Circe, thou their votaress !) to proclaim
For these thy guests all rapture in Love's name,
Till pitiless Night give Day the countersign ?

Lords of their hour, they come. And by her knee
Those cowering beasts, their equals heretofore,
Wait ; who with them in new equality
To-night shall echo back the sea's dull roar
With a vain wail from passion's tide-strown shore
Where the disheveled seaweed hates the sea.

MARY'S GIRLHOOD.

(For a Picture.)

THIS is that blessed Mary, pre-elect
God's Virgin. Gone is a great while, and she
Dwelt young in Nazareth of Galilee.
Unto God's will she brought devout respect,
Profound simplicity of intellect,
And supreme patience. From her mother's knee
Faithful and hopeful ; wise in charity ;
Strong in grave peace ; in pity circumspect.

So held she through her girlhood ; as it were
An angel-watered lily, that near God
Grows and is quiet. Till, one dawn at home,
She woke in her white bed, and had no fear
At all,— yet wept till sunshine, and felt awed :
Because the fullness of the time was come.

THE PASSOVER IN THE HOLY FAMILY.

(For a Drawing.)*

HERE meet together the prefiguring day
And day prefigured. "Eating, thou shalt stand,
Feet shod, loins girt, thy road-staff in thine hand,
With blood-stained door and lintel,"— did God say
By Moses' mouth in ages passed away.
And now, where this poor household doth comprise
At Paschal-Feast two kindred families,—
Lo ! the slain lamb confronts the Lamb to slay.

The pyre is piled. What agony's crown attained,
What shadow of Death the Boy's fair brow subdueth
Who holds that blood wherewith the porch is stained
By Zachary the priest ? John binds the shoes
He deemed himself not worthy to unloose ;
And Mary culls the bitter herbs ordained.

* The scene is in the house-porch, where Christ holds a bowl of blood from which Zacharias is sprinkling the posts and lintel. Joseph has brought the lamb and Elizabeth lights the pyre. The shoes which John fastens and the bitter herbs which Mary is gathering form part of the ritual.

MARY MAGDALENE.

AT THE DOOR OF SIMON THE PHARISEE.

(For a Drawing.)*

“WHY wilt thou cast the roses from thine hair ?
Nay, be thou all a rose,—wreath, lips, and cheek.
Nay, not this house,—that banquet-house we seek ;
See how they kiss and enter ; come thou there.
This delicate day of love we two will share
Till at our ear love’s whispering night shall speak.
What, sweet one,—hold’st thou still the foolish
freak ?
Nay, when I kiss thy feet they’ll leave the stair.”

“Oh loose me ! Seest thou not my Bridegroom’s face
That draws me to Him ? For His feet my kiss,
My hair, my tears He craves to-day : —and oh !
What words can tell what other day and place
Shall see me clasp those blood-stained feet of His ?
He needs me, calls me, loves me : let me go !”

* In the drawing Mary has left a festal procession, and is ascending by a sudden impulse the steps of the house where she sees Christ. Her lover has followed her and is trying to turn her back.

SAINT LUKE THE PAINTER.

(For a Drawing.)

GIVE honor unto Luke Evangelist ;
For he it was (the aged legends say)
Who first taught Art to fold her hands and pray.
Scarcely at once she dared to rend the mist
Of devious symbols : but soon having wist
How sky breadth and field-silence and this day
Are symbols also in some deeper way,
She looked through these to God and was God's priest.

And if, past noon, her toil began to irk,
And she sought talismans, and turned in vain
To soulless self-reflections of man's skill,—
Yet now, in this the twilight, she might still
Kneel in the latter grass to pray again,
Ere the night cometh and she may not work.

LILITH.

(For a Picture.)

OF Adam's first wife, Lilith, it is told
(The witch he loved before the gift of Eve,)
That, ere the snake's, her sweet tongue could deceive,
And her enchanted hair was the first gold.
And still she sits, young while the earth is old,
And, subtly of herself contemplative,
Draws men to watch the bright net she can weave,
Till heart and body and life are in its hold.

The rose and poppy are her flowers ; for where
Is he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent
And soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare ?
Lo ! as that youth's eyes burned at thine, so went
Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck
bent,
And round his heart one strangling golden hair.

SIBYLLA PALMIFERA.

(For a Picture.)

UNDER the arch of Life, where love and death,
Terror and mystery, guard her shrine, I saw
Beauty enthroned ; and though her gaze struck awe,
I drew it in as simply as my breath.
Hers are the eyes which, over and beneath,
The sky and sea bend on thee,— which can draw,
By sea or sky or woman, to one law,
The allotted bondman of her palm and wreath.

This is that Lady Beauty, in whose praise
Thy voice and hand shake still,— long known to thee
By flying hair and fluttering hem,— the beat
Following her daily of thy heart and feet,
How passionately and irretrievably,
In what fond flight, how many ways and days !

VENUS VERTICORDIA.

(For a Picture.)

SHE hath the apple in her hand for thee,
Yet almost in her heart would hold it back ;
She muses, with her eyes upon the track
Of that which in thy spirit they can see.
Haply, “ Behold, he is at peace,” saith she ;
“ Alas ! the apple for his lips,— the dart
That follows its brief sweetness to his heart,—
The wandering of his feet perpetually ! ”

A little space her glance is still and coy ;
But if she give the fruit that works her spell,
Those eyes shall flame as for her Phrygian boy.
Then shall her bird's strained throat the woe fore-
tell,
And her far seas moan as a single shell,
And through her dark grove strike the light of Troy.

CASSANDRA.

(For a Drawing.)*

I.

REND, rend thine hair, Cassandra : he will go.
Yea, rend thy garments, wring thine hands, and cry
From Troy still towered to the unreddened sky.
See, all but she that bore thee mock thy woe : —
He most whom that fair woman arms, with show
Of wrath on her bent brows ; for in this place
This hour thou bad'st all men in Helen's face
The ravished ravishing prize of Death to know.

What eyes, what ears hath sweet Andromache,
Save for her Hector's form and step ; as tear
On tear make salt the warm last kiss he gave ?
He goes. Cassandra's words beat heavily
Like crows above his crest, and at his ear
Ring hollow in the shield that shall not save.

* The subject shows Cassandra prophesying among her kindred, as Hector leaves them for his last battle. They are on the platform of a fortress, from which the Trojan troops are marching out. Helen is arming Paris ; Priam soothes Hecuba ; and Andromache holds the child to her bosom.

II.

“O Hector, gone, gone, gone ! O Hector, thee
 Two chariots wait, in Troy long bless'd and curs'd ;
 And Grecian spear and Phrygian sand athirst
 Crave from thy veins the blood of victory.
 Lo ! long upon our hearth the brand had we,
 Lit for the roof-tree's ruin : and to-day
 The ground-stone quits the wall,—the wind hath
 way,—
 And higher and higher the wings of fire are free.

O Paris, Paris ! O thou burning brand,
 Thou beacon of the sea whence Venus rose,
 Lighting thy race to shipwreck ! Even that hand
 Wherewith she took thine apple let her close
 Within thy curls at last, and while Troy glows
 Lift thee her trophy to the sea and land.”

PANDORA.

(For a Picture.)

WHAT of the end, Pandora ? Was it thine,
 The deed that set these fiery pinions free ?
 Ah ! wherefore did the Olympian consistory
 In its own likeness make thee half divine ?
 Was it that Juno's brow might stand a sign
 For ever ? and the mien of Pallas be
 A deadly thing ? and that all men might see
 In Venus' eyes the gaze of Proserpine ?

What of the end ? These beat their wings at will,
 The ill-born things, the good things turned to ill,—
 Powers of the impassioned hours prohibited.
 Ay, clench the casket now ! Whither they go
 Thou mayst not dare to think : nor canst thou know
 If Hope still pent there be alive or dead.

ON REFUSAL OF AID BETWEEN NATIONS

Nor that the earth is changing, O my God !

Nor that the seasons totter in their walk,—

Not that the virulent ill of act and talk

Seethes ever as a winepress ever trod,—

Not therefore are we certain that the rod

Weights in thine hand to smite thy world ; though
now

Beneath thine hand so many nations bow,

So many kings : — not therefore, O my God ! —

But because Man is parceled out in men

To-day ; because, for any wrongful blow,

No man not stricken asks, “ I would be told

Why thou dost thus ; ” but his heart whispers **then**,

“ He is he, I am I.” By this we know

That the earth falls asunder, being old.

ON THE “VITA NUOVA” OF DANTE.

As he that loves oft looks on the dear form

And guesses how it grew to womanhood,

And gladly would have watched the beauties bud

And the mild fire of precious life wax warm : —

So I, long bound within the threefold charm

Of Dante’s love sublimed to heavenly mood,

Had marveled, touching his Beatitude,

How grew such presence from man’s shameful swarm

At length within this book I found portrayed

Newborn that Paradisal Love of his,

And simple like a child ; with whose clear aid

I understood. To such a child as this,

Christ, charging well his chosen ones, forbade

Offense : “ for lo ! of such my kingdom is.”

DANTIS TENEBRÆ.

(In Memory of my Father.)

AND didst thou know indeed, when at the font
Together with thy name thou gav'st me his,
That also on thy son must Beatrice
Decline her eyes according to her wont,
Accepting me to be of those that haunt
The vale of magical dark mysteries
Where to the hills her poet's foot track lies
And wisdom's living fountain to his chaunt
Trembles in music? This is that steep land
Where he that holds his journey stands at gaze
Tow'rd sunset, when the clouds like a new height
Seem piled to climb. These things I understand :
For here, where day still soothes my lifted face,
On thy bowed head, my father, fell the night.

BEAUTY AND THE BIRD.

SHE fluted with her mouth as when one sips,
And gently waved her golden head, inclin'd
Outside his cage close to the window-blind ;
Till her fond bird, with little turns and dips,
Piped low to her of sweet companionships.
And when he made an end, some seed took *she*
And fed him from her tongue, which rosily
Peeped as a piercing bud between her lips.

And like the child in Chaucer, on whose tongue
The Blessed Mary laid, when he was dead,
A grain,— who straightway praised her name in song :
Even so, when she, a little lightly red,
Now turned on me and laughed, I heard the throng
Of inner voices praise her golden head.

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 Of inner voices praise her golden head.

A MATCH WITH THE MOON.

WEARY already, weary miles to-night
 I walked for bed : and so, to get some ease,
 I dogged the flying moon with similes.
 And like a wisp she doubled on my sight
 In ponds ; and caught in tree-tops like a kite ;
 And in a globe of film all vaporish
 Swam full-faced like a silly silver fish ; —
 Last like a bubble shot the welkin's height
 Where my road turned, and got behind me, sent
 My wizened shadow craning round at me,
 And jeered, " So, step the measure,— one two
 three ! " —
 And if I faced on her, looked innocent.
 But just at parting, halfway down a dell,
 She kissed me for good-night. So you'll not tell

AUTUMN IDLENESS.

THIS sunlight shames November where he grieves
 In dead red leaves, and will not let him shun
 The day, though bough with bough be over-run.
 But with a blessing every glade receives
 High salutation ; while from hillock-eaves
 The deer gaze calling, dappled white and dun,
 As if, being foresters of old, the sun
 Had marked them with the shade of forest-leaves.

Here dawn to-day unveiled her magic glass ;
 Here noon now gives the thirst and takes the dew ;
 Till eve bring rest when other good things pass.
 And here the lost hours the lost hours renew
 While I still lead my shadow o'er the grass,
 Nor know, for longing, that which I should do.

FAREWELL TO THE GLEN.

SWEET stream-fed glen, why say "farewell" to thee
Who far'st so well and find'st for ever smooth
The brow of Time where man may read no ruth?
Nay, do thou rather say "farewell" to me,
Who now fare forth in bitterer fantasy
Than erst was mine where other shade might soothe
By other streams, what while in fragrant youth
The bliss of being sad made melancholy.

And yet, farewell! For better shalt thou fare
When children bathe sweet faces in thy flow
And happy lovers blend sweet shadows there
In hours to come, than when an hour ago
Thine echoes had but one man's sighs to bear
And thy trees whispered what he feared to know.

THE MONOCHORD.

(*Written during Music.*)

Is it the moved air or the moving sound
That is Life's self and draws my life from me,
And by instinct ineffable decree
Holds my breath quailing on the bitter bound?
Nay, is it Life or Death, thus thunder-crown'd,
That 'mid the tide of all emergency
Now notes my separate wave, and to what sea
Its difficult eddies labor in the ground?

Oh! what is this that knows the road I came,
The flame turned cloud, the cloud returned to flame,
The lifted shifted steeps and all the way? —
That draws round me at last this wind-warm space,
And in regenerate rapture turns my face
Upon the devious coverts of dismay?

ROSE MARY.

*Of her two fights with the Beryl-stone:
Lost the first, but the second won.*

PART I.

“MARY mine that art Mary’s Rose,
Come in to me from the garden-close.
The sun sinks fast with the rising dew,
And we marked not how the faint moon grew ;
But the hidden stars are calling you.

“Tall Rose Mary, come to my side,
And read the stars if you’d be a bride.
In hours whose need was not your own,
While you were a young maid yet unknown,
You’ve read the stars in the Beryl-stone.

“Daughter, once more I bid you read ;
But now let it be for your own need :
Because to-morrow, at break of day,
To Holy Cross he rides on his way,
Your knight Sir James of Heronhaye.

“Ere he wed you, flower of mine,
For a heavy shrift he seeks the shrine.
Now hark to my words and do not fear ;
Ill news next I have for your ear ;
But be you strong, and our help is here.

“On his road, as the rumor’s rife,
An ambush waits to take his life.
He needs will go, and will go alone ;
Where the peril lurks may not be known ;
But in this glass all things are shown.”

Pale Rose Mary sank to the floor : —
“The night will come if the day is o’er !”
“Nay, heaven takes counsel, star with star,
And help shall reach your heart from afar :
A bride you’ll be, as a maid you are.”

The lady unbound her jeweled zone
And drew from her robe the Beryl-stone.
Shaped it was to a shadowy sphere,—
World of our world, the sun’s compeer,
That bears and buries the toiling year.

With shuddering light ’t was stirred and **strewn**
Like the cloud-nest of the wading moon :
Freaked it was as the bubble’s ball,
Rainbow-hued through a misty pall
Like the middle light of the waterfall.

Shadows dwelt in its teeming girth
Of the known and unknown things of **earth** ;
The cloud above and the wave around,—
The central fire at the sphere’s heart bound,
Like doomsday prisoned underground.

A thousand years it lay in the sea
With a treasure wrecked from Thessaly ;
Deep it lay ’mid the coiled sea-wrack,
But the ocean-spirits found the track :
A soul was lost to win it back.

The lady upheld the wondrous thing : —
“Ill fare” (she said) “with a fiend’s-fairing :
But Moslem blood poured forth like wine
Can hallow Hell, ’neath the Sacred Sign ;
And my lord brought this from Palestine.

“Spirits who fear the Blessed Rood
Drove forth the accursed multitude
That heathen worship housed herein,—
Never again such home to win,
Save only by a Christian’s sin

"All last night at an altar fair
I burnt strange fires and strove with prayer ;
Till the flame paled to the red sunrise,
All rites I then did solemnize ;
And the spell lacks nothing but your eyes."

Low spake maiden Rose Mary : —
"O mother mine, if I should not see !"
"Nay, daughter, cover your face no more,
But bend love's heart to the hidden lore,
And you shall see now as heretofore."

Paler yet were the pale cheeks grown
As the gray eyes sought the Beryl-stone :
Then over her mother's lap leaned she,
And stretched her thrilled throat passionately
And sighed from her soul, and said, "I see."

Even as she spoke, they two were 'ware
Of music-notes that fell through the air ;
A chiming shower of strange device,
Drop echoing drop, once twice and thrice,
As rain may fall in Paradise.

An instant come, in an instant gone,
No time there was to think thereon.
The mother held the sphere on her knee : —
"Lean this way and speak low to me,
And take no note but of what you see."

"I see a man with a besom gray
That sweeps the flying dust away."
"Ay, that comes first in the mystic sphere ;
But now that the way is swept and clear,
Heed well what next you look on there."

"Stretched aloft and adown I see
Two roads that part in waste-country :
The glen lies deep and the ridge stands tall ;
What's great below is above seen small,
And the hill-side is the valley-wall."

"Stream-bank, daughter, or moor and moss,
Both roads will take to Holy Cross.
The hills are a weary waste to wage ;
But what of the valley-road's presage ?
That way must tend his pilgrimage."

"As 'twere the turning leaves of a book,
The road runs past me as I look ;
Or it is even as though mine eye
Should watch calm waters filled with sky
While lights and clouds and wings went by."

"In every covert seek a spear ;
They'll scarce lie close till he draws near."
"The stream has spread to a river now ;
The stiff blue sedge is deep in the slough,
But the banks are bare of shrub or bough."

"Is there any roof that near at hand
Might shelter yield to a hidden band ?"
"On the further bank I see but one,
And a herdsman now in the sinking sun
Unyokes his team at the threshold-stone."

"Keep heedful watch by the water's edge,—
Some boat might lurk 'neath the shadowed sedge."
"One slid but now 'twixt the winding shores,
But a peasant woman bent to the oars
And only a young child steered its course."

"Mother, something flashed to my sight !—
Nay, it is but the lapwing's flight.—
What glints there like a lance that flees ?—
Nay, the flags are stirred in the breeze,
And the water's bright through the dark-rushes."

"Ah ! vainly I search from side to side :—
Woe's me ! and where do the foemen hide ?
Woe's me ! and perchance I pass them by,
And under the new dawn's blood-red sky
Even where I gaze the dead shall lie."

Said the mother : " For dear love's sake,
 Speak more low, lest the spell should break."
 Said the daughter : " By love's control,
 My eyes, my words, are strained to the goal ;
 But oh ! the voice that cries in my soul ! "

" Hush, sweet, hush ! be calm and behold."
 " I see two floodgates broken and old :
 The grasses wave o'er the ruined weir,
 But the bridge still leads to the breakwater ;
 And — mother, mother, O mother dear ! "

The damsel clung to her mother's knee,
 And dared not let the shriek go free ;
 Low she crouched by the lady's chair,
 And shrank blindfold in her fallen hair,
 And whispering said, " The spears are there ! "

The lady stooped aghast from her place,
 And cleared the locks from her daughter's face
 " More's to see, and she swoons, alas !
 Look, look again, ere the moment pass !
 One shadow comes but once to the glass.

" See you there what you saw but now ? "
 " I see eight men 'neath the willow-bough.
 All over the weir a wild growth's spread :
 Ah me ! it will hide a living head
 As well as the water hides the dead.

" They lie by the broken water-gate
 As men who have a while to wait.
 The chief's high lance has a blazoned scroll,—
 He seems some lord of tithe and toll
 With seven squires to his bannerole.

" The little pennon quakes in the air,
 I cannot trace the blazon there : —
 Ah ! now I can see the field of blue,
 The spurs and the merlins two and two ; —
 It is the Warden of Holyelengh ! "

“God be thanked for the thing we know !
You have named your good knight’s mortal foe
Last Shrovetide in the tourney-game
He sought his life by treasonous shame ;
And this way now doth he seek the same.

“So, fair lord, such a thing you are !
But we too watch till the morning star.
Well, June is kind and the moon is clear :
Saint Judas send you a merry cheer
For the night you lie at Warisweir !

“Now, sweet daughter, but one more sight,
And you may lie soft and sleep to-night.
We know in the vale what perils be :
Now look once more in the glass, and see
If over the hills the road lies free.”

Rose Mary pressed to her mother’s cheek,
And almost smiled but did not speak ;
Then turned again to the saving spell,
With eyes to search and with lips to tell
The heart of things invisible.

“Again the shape with the besom gray
Comes back to sweep the clouds away.
Again I stand where the roads divide ;
But now all’s near on the steep hillside,
And a thread far down is the rivertide.”

“Ay, child, your road is o’er moor and moss,
Past Helycleugh to Holy Cross.
Our hunters lurk in the valley’s wake,
As they knew which way the chase would take
Yet search the hills for your true love’s sake.”

“Swift and swifter the waste runs by,
And naught I see but the heath and the sky ;
No brake is there that could hide a spear,
And the gaps to a horseman’s sight lie clear ;
Still past it goes, and there’s naught to fear.”

"Fear no trap that you cannot see,—
They'd not lurk yet too warily.
Below by the weir they lie in sight,
And take no heed how they pass the night
Till close they crouch with the morning light."

"The road shifts ever and brings in view
Now first the heights of Holycleugh :
Dark they stand o'er the vale below,
And hide that heaven which yet shall show
The thing their master's heart doth know.

"Where the road looks to the castle steep,
There are seven hill-clefts wide and deep :
Six mine eyes can search as they list,
But the seventh hollow is brimmed with mist ;
If aught were there, it might not be wist."

"Small hope, my girl, for a helm to hide
In mists that cling to a wild moorside :
Soon they melt with the wind and sun,
And scarce would wait such deeds to be done
God send their snares be the worst to shun."

"Still the road winds ever anew
As it hastens on towards Holycleugh ;
And ever the great walls loom more near,
Till the castle-shadow, steep and sheer,
Drifts like a cloud, and the sky is clear."

"Enough, my daughter," the mother said,
And took to her breast the bending head ;
"Rest, poor head, with my heart below,
While love still lulls you as long ago :
For all is learnt that we need to know.

"Long the miles and many the hours
From the castle-height to the abbey-towers ;
But here the journey has no more dread ;
Too thick with life is the whole road spread
For murder's trembling foot to tread."

She gazed on the Beryl-stone full fain
 Ere she wrapped it close in her robe again :
 The flickering shades were dusk and dun,
 And the lights throbbled faint in unison,
 Like a high heart when a race is run.

As the globe slid to its silken gloom,
 Once more a music rained through the room;
 Low it splashed like a sweet star-spray,
 And sobbed like tears at the heart of May,
 And died as laughter dies away.

The lady held her breath for a space,
 And then she looked in her daughter's face :
 But wan Rose Mary had never heard ;
 Deep asleep like a sheltered bird
 She lay with the long spell minister'd.

" Ah ! and yet I must leave you, dear,
 For what you have seen your knight must hear.
 Within four days, by the help of God,
 He comes back safe to his heart's abode :
 Be sure he shall shun the valley-road."

Rose Mary sank with a broken moan,
 And lay in the chair and slept alone,
 Weary, lifeless, heavy as lead :
 Long it was ere she raised her head
 And rose up all discomforted.

She searched her brain for a vanished thing,
 And clasped her brows, remembering ;
 Then knelt and lifted her eyes in awe,
 And sighed with a long sigh sweet to draw :—
 " Thank God, thank God, thank God I saw ! "

The lady had left her as she lay,
 To seek the Knight of Heronhay.
 But first she clomb by a secret stair,
 And knelt at a carven altar fair,
 And laid the precious Beryl there.

Its girth was graved with a mystic rune
 In a tongue long dead 'neath sun and moon :
 A priest of the Holy Sepulcher
 Read that writing and did not err ;
 And her lord had told its sense to her.

She breathed the words in an undertone : —
"None sees here but the pure alone."
 "And oh !" she said, "what rose may be
 In Mary's bower more pure to see
 Than my own sweet maiden Rose Mary ?"

BERYL-SONG.

*We whose home is the Beryl,
 Fire-spirits of dread desire,
 Who entered in
 By a secret sin,* [sterile,—
*'Gainst whom all powers that strive with ours are
 We cry, Woe to thee, mother !
 What hast thou taught her, the girl thy daughter,
 That she and none other
 Should this dark morrow to her deadly sorrow imperil ?
 What were her eyes
 But the fiend's own spies,
 O mother,
 And shall We not fee her, our proper prophet and seer ?
 Go to her, mother,
 Even thou, yea thou and none other,
 Thou, from the Beryl :
 Her fee must thou take her,
 Her fee that We send, and make her,
 Even in this hour, her sin's unsheltered avower.
 Whose steed did neigh,
 Riderless, bridle-less,
 At her gate before it was day ?
 Lo ! where doth hover
 The soul of her lover ?*

*She sealed his doom, she, she was the sworn approver,—
 Whose eyes were so wondrous wise,
 Yet blind, ah ! blind to his peril !
 For stole not We in
 Through a love-linked sin,
 'Gainst whom all powers at war with ours are sterile,—
 Fire-spirits of dread desire,
 We whose home is the Beryl ?*

PART II.

“PALE Rose Mary, what shall be done
 With a rose that Mary weeps upon ?”

“Mother, let it fall from the tree,
 And never walk where the strewn leaves be
 Till winds have passed and the path is free.”

“Sad Rose Mary, what shall be done
 With a cankered flower beneath the sun ?”

“Mother, let it wait for the night ;
 Be sure its shame shall be out of sight
 Ere the moon pale or the east grow light.”

“Lost Rose Mary, what shall be done
 With a heart that is but a broken one ?”

“Mother, let it lie where it must ;
 The blood was drained with the bitter thrust,
 And dust is all that sinks in the dust.”

“Poor Rose Mary, what shall I do,—
 I, your mother, that lovèd you ?”

“O my mother, and is love gone ?
 Then seek you another love anon :
 Who cares what shame shall lean upon ?”

Low drooped trembling Rose Mary,
 Then up as though in a dream stood she.

“Come, my heart, it is time to go ;
 This is the hour that has whispered low
 When thy pulse quailed in the nights we know.

"Yet O my heart, thy shame has a mate
Who will not leave thee desolate.
Shame for shame, yea and sin for sin :
Yet peace at length may our poor souls win
If love for love be found therein.

"O thou who seek'st our shrift to-day,"
She cried, "O James of Heronhaye —
Thy sin and mine was for love alone ;
And oh ! in the sight of God 't is known
How the heart has since made heavy moan.

"Three days yet !" she said to her heart ;
"But then he comes, and we will not part.
God, God be thanked that I still could see !
Oh ! he shall come back assuredly,
But where, alas ! must he seek for me ?

"O my heart, what road shall we roam
Till my wedding-music fetch me home ?
For love 's shut from us and bides afar,
And scorn leans over the bitter bar
And knows us now for the thing we are."

Tall she stood with a cheek flushed high
And a gaze to burn the heart-strings by.
'Twas the lightning flash o'er sky and plain
Ere laboring thunders heave the chain
From the floodgates of the drowning rain.

The mother looked on the daughter still
As on a hurt thing that 's yet to kill.
Then wildly at length the pent tears came ;
The love swelled high with the swollen shame,
And their hearts' tempest burst on them.

Closely locked, they clung without speech,
And the mirrored souls shook each to each,
As the cloud-moon and the water-moon
Shake face to face when the dim stars swoon
In stormy bowers of the night's mid-noon.

They swayed together, shuddering sore,
Till the mother's heart could bear no more.
'Twas death to feel her own breast shake
Even to the very throb and ache
Of the burdened heart she still must break.

All her sobs ceased suddenly,
And she sat straight up but scarce could see.
"O daughter, where should my speech begin?
Your heart held fast its secret sin :
How think you, child, that I read therein?"

"Ah me ! but I thought not how it came
When your words showed that you knew my
 shame :
And now that you call me still your own,
I half forget you have ever known.
Did you read my heart in the Beryl-stone?"

The lady answered her mournfully : —
"The Beryl-stone has no voice for me :
But when you charged its power to show
The truth which none but the pure may know,
Did naught speak once of a coming woe?"

Her hand was close to her daughter's heart,
And it felt the life-blood's sudden start :
A quick deep breath did the damsel draw,
Like the struck fawn in the oakenshaw :
"O mother," she cried, "but still I saw!"

"O child, my child, why held you apart
From my great love your hidden heart?
Said I not that all sin must chase
From the spell's sphere the spirits of grace,
And yield their rule to the evil race?"

"Ah ! would to God I had clearly told
How strong those powers, accurst of old :
Their heart is the ruined house of lies ;
O girl, they can seal the sinful eyes.
Or show the truth by contraries !"

The daughter sat as cold as a stone,
And spoke no word but gazed alone,
Nor moved, though her mother strove a space
To clasp her round in a close embrace,
Because she dared not see her face.

“ Oh ! ” at last did the mother cry,
“ Be sure, as he loved you, so will I !
Ah ! still and dumb is the bride, I trow ;
But cold and stark as the winter snow
Is the bridegroom’s heart, laid dead below !

“ Daughter, daughter, remember you
That cloud in the hills by Holycleugh ?
’Twas a Hell-screen hiding truth away :
There, not i’ the vale, the ambush lay,
And thence was the dead borne home to-day.”

Deep the flood and heavy the shock
When sea meets sea in the riven rock :
But calm is the pulse that shakes the sea
To the prisoned tide of doom set free
In the breaking heart of Rose Mary.

Once she sprang as the heifer springs
With the wolf’s teeth at its red heart-strings :
First ’twas fire in her breast and brain,
And then scarce hers but the whole world’s pain,
As she gave one shriek and sank again.

In the hair dark-waved the face lay white
As the moon lies in the lap of night ;
And as night through which no moon may dart
Lies on a pool in the woods apart,
So lay the swoon on the weary heart.

The lady felt for the bosom’s stir,
And wildly kissed and called on her ;
Then turned away with a quick footfall,
And slid the secret door in the wall,
And clomb the straight stair’s interval.

There above in the altar-cell
A little fountain rose and fell :
She set a flask to the water's flow,
And, backward hurrying, sprinkled now
The still cold breast and the pallid brow.

Scarce cheek that warmed or breath on the air,
Yet something told that life was there.
"Ah ! not with the heart the body dies !"
The lady moaned in a bitter wise ;
Then wrung her hands and hid her eyes.

"Alas ! and now may I meet again
In the same poor eyes the self-same pain ?
What help can I seek, such grief to guide ?
Ah ! one alone might avail," she cried,—
"The priest who prays at the dead man's side."

The lady arose, and sped down all
The winding stairs to the castle-hall.
Long-known valley and wood and stream,
As the loopholes passed, naught else did seem
Than the torn threads of a broken dream.

The hall was full of the castle-folk ;
The women wept, but the men scarce spoke.
As the lady crossed the rush-strewn floor,
The throng fell backward, murmuring sore,
And pressed outside round the open door.

A stranger shadow hung on the hall
Then the dark pomp of a funeral.
'Mid common sights that were there alway,
As 't were a chance of the passing day,
On the ingle-bench the dead man lay.

A priest who passed by Holycleugh
The tidings brought when the day was new.
He guided them who had fetched the dead ;
And since that hour, unwearied,
He knelt in prayer at the low bier's head.

Word had gone to his own domain
That in evil wise the knight was slain :
Soon the spears must gather apace
And the hunt be hard on the hunters' trace ;
But all things yet lay still for a space.

As the lady's hurried step drew near,
The kneeling priest looked up to her.
" Father, death is a grievous thing ;
But oh ? the woe has a shaper sting
That craves by me your ministering.

" Alas for the child that should have wed
This noble knight here lying dead !
Dead in hope, with all blessed boon
Of love thus rent from her heart ere noon,
I left her laid in a heavy swoon.

" O haste to the open bower-chamber
That 's topmost as you mount the stair :
Seek her, father, ere yet she wake ;
Your words, not mine, be the first to slake
This poor heart's fire, for Christ's sweet sake !

" God speed !" she said as the priest passed
through,
" And I ere long will be with you."
Then low on the hearth her knees sank prone ;
She signed all folk from the threshold-stone,
And gazed in the dead man's face alone.

The fight for life found record yet
In the clenched lips and the teeth hard-set ;
The wrath from the bent brow was not gone,
And stark in the eyes the hate still shone
Of that they last had looked upon.

The blazoned coat was rent on his breast
Where the golden field was goodliest ;
But the shivered sword, close-gripped, could tell
That the blood shed round him where he fell
Was not all his in the distant dell.

The lady recked of the corpse no whit,
But saw the soul and spoke to it :
A light there was in her steadfast eyes,—
The fire of mortal tears and sighs
That pity and love immortalize.

“ By thy death have I learnt to-day
Thy deed, O James of Heronhaye !
Great wrong thou hast done to me and mine ;
And haply God hath wrought for a sign
By our blind deed this doom of thine.

“ Thy shrift, alas ! thou wast not to win ;
But may death shrive thy soul herein !
Full well do I know thy love should be
Even yet — had life but stayed with thee —
Our honor's strong security.”

She stooped, and said with a sob's low stir,—
“ Peace be thine,— but what peace for her ? ”
But ere to the brow her lips were press'd,
She marked, half-hid in the riven vest,
A packet close to the dead man's breast.

'Neath surcoat pierced and broken mail
It lay on the blood-stained bosom pale.
The clot clung round it, dull and dense,
And a faintness seized her mortal sense
As she reached her hand and drew it thence.

'Twas steeped in the heart's flood welling high
From the heart it there had rested by :
'Twas glued to a broidered fragment gay,—
A shred by spear-thrust rent away
From the heron wings of Heronhaye.

She gazed on the thing with piteous eyne :—
“ Alas, poor child, some pledge of thine !
Ah me ! in this troth the hearts were twain,
And one hath ebb'd to this crimson stain,
And when shall the other throb again ? ”

She opened the packet heedfully ;
The blood was stiff, and it scarce might be.
She found but a folded paper there,
And round it, twined with tenderest care,
A long bright tress of golden hair.

Even as she looked, she saw again
That dark-haired face in its swoon of pain :
It seemed a snake with a golden sheath
Crept near, as a slow flame flickereth,
And stung her daughter's heart to death.

She loosed the tress, but her hand did shake
As though indeed she had touched a snake ;
And next she undid the paper's fold,
But that too trembled in her hold,
And the sense scarce grasped the tale it told.

"My heart's sweet lord," 'twas thus she read,
"At length our love is garlanded.
"At Holy Cross, within eight days' space,
"I seek my shrift ; and the time and place
"Shall fit thee too for thy soul's good grace.

"From Holycleugh on the seventh day
"My brother rides, and bides away :
"And long or e'er he is back, mine own,
"Afar where the face of fear's unknown
"We shall be safe with our love alone.

"Ere yet at the shrine my knees I bow,
"I shear one tress for our holy vow.
"As round these words these threads I wind,
"So, eight days hence, shall our loves be twined,
"Says my lord's poor lady, JOCELIND."

She read it twice, with a brain in thrall,
And then its echo told her all.
O'er brows low-fall'n her hands she drew :—
"O God !" she said, as her hands fell too,—
"The Warden's sister of Holycleugh !"

She rose upright with a long low moan,
 And stared in the dead man's face new-known.
 Had it lived indeed? She scarce could tell :
 'Twas a cloud where fiends had come to dwell,—
 A mask that hung on the gate of Hell.

She lifted the lock of gleaming hair
 And smote the lips and left it there.
 "Here 's gold that Hell shall take for thy toll!
 Full well hath thy treason found its goal,
 O thou dead body and damnèd soul!"

She turned, sore dazed, for a voice was near,
 And she knew that some one called to her.
 On many a column fair and tall
 A high court ran round the castle-hall;
 And thence it was that the priest did call.

"I sought your child where you bade me go,
 And in rooms around and rooms below;
 But where, alas! may the maiden be?
 Fear naught,—we shall find her speedily,—
 But come, come hither, and seek with me."

She reached the stair like a lifelorn thing,
 But hastened upward murmuring :—
 "Yea, Death's is a face that's fell to see;
 But bitterer pang Life hoards for thee,
 Thou broken heart of Rose Mary!"

BERYL-SONG.

*We whose throne is the Beryl,
 Dire-gifted spirits of fire,
 Who for a twin
 Leash Sorrow to Sin,
 Who on no flower refrain to lour with peril,—
 We cry,— O desolate daughter!*

*Thou and thy mother share newer shame with each other
Than last night's slaughter.*

*Awake and tremble, for our curses assemble !
What more, that thou know'st not yet,—
That life nor death shall forget ?*

*No help from Heaven,—thy woes heart-riven are
sterile !*

*O, once a maiden,
With yet worse sorrow can any morrow be laden ?*

*It waits for thee,
It looms, it must be,*

O lost among women,—

It comes and thou canst not flee.

Amen to the omen,

Says the voice of the Beryl.

Thou sleep'st ? Awake,—

What dar'st thou yet for his sake,

Who each for other did God's own Future imperil ?

Dost dare to live

'Mid the pangs each hour must give ?

Nay, rather die,—

With him thy lover 'neath Hell's cloud-cover to fly,—

Hopeless, yet not apart,

Cling heart to heart,

*And beat through the nether storm-eddying winds
together ?*

Shall this be so ?

*There thou shalt meet him, but may'st thou greet him ?
ah no !*

He loves, but thee he hoped never more to see,—

He sighed as he died,

But with never a thought for thee.

Alone !

Alone, for ever alone,—

*Whose eyes were such wondrous spies for the fate
foreshown !*

Lo ! have not We leashed the twin

Of endless Sorrow to Sin,—

Who on no flower refrain to lour with peril,—

Dire-gifted spirits of fire,

We whose throne is the Beryl ?

PART III.

A swoon that breaks is the whelming wave
When help comes late but still can save.
With all blind throes is the instant rife,—
Hurling clangor and clouds at strife,—
The breath of death, but the kiss of life.

The night lay deep on Rose Mary's heart,
For her swoon was death's kind counterpart :
The dawn broke dim on Rose Mary's soul,—
No hill-crown's heavenly aureole,
But a wild gleam on a shaken shoal.

Her senses gasped in the sudden air,
And she looked around, but none was there.
She felt the slackening frost distill
Through her blood the last ooze dull and chill :
Her lids were dry and her lips were still.

Her tears had flooded her heart again ;
As after a long day's bitter rain,
At dusk when the wet flower-cups shrink,
The drops run in from the beaded brink,
And all the close-shut petals drink.

Again her sighs on her heart were rolled ;
As the wind that long has swept the wold,—
Whose moan was made with the moaning sea,—
Beats out its breath in the last torn tree,
And sinks at length in lethargy.

She knew she had waded bosom-deep
Along death's bank in the sedge of sleep :
All else was lost to her clouded mind ;
Nor, looking back, could she see defin'd
O'er the dim dumb waste what lay behind.

Slowly fades the sun from the wall
Till day lies dead on the sun-dial :

And now in Rose Mary's lifted eye
'Twas shadow alone that made reply
To the set face of the soul's dark sky.

Yet still through her soul there wandered **past**
Dread phantoms borne on a wailing blast,—
Death and sorrow and sin and shame ;
And, murmured still, to her lips there **came**
Her mother's and her lover's name.

How to ask, and what thing to know ?
She might not stay and she dared not go.
From fires unseen these smoke-clouds curled ;
But where did the hidden curse lie furled ?
And how to seek through the weary world ?

With toiling breath she rose from the floor
And dragged her steps to an open door :
'Twas the secret panel standing wide,
As the lady's hand had let it bide
In hastening back to her daughter's side.

She passed, but reeled with a dizzy brain
And smote the door which closed again.
She stood within by the darkling stair,
But her feet might mount more freely **there,—**
'Twas the open light most blinded her.

Within her mind no wonder grew
At the secret path she never knew :
All ways alike were strange to her now,—
One field bare-ridged from the spirit's plow,
One thicket black with the cypress-bough.

Once she thought that she heard her name ;
And she paused, but knew not whence it **came**
Down the shadowed stair a faint ray fell
That guided the weary footsteps well
Till it led her up to the altar-cell.

No change there was on Rose Mary's face
As she leaned in the portal's narrow space ·
Still she stood by the pillar's stem,
Hand and bosom and garment's hem,
As the soul stands by at the requiem.

The altar-cell was a dome low-lit,
And a veil hung in the midst of it :
At the pole-points of its circling girth
Four symbols stood of the world's first birth,—
Air and water and fire and earth.

To the north, a fountain glittered free ;
To the south, there glowed a red fruit-tree ;
To the east, a lamp flamed high and fair ;
To the west, a crystal casket rare
Held fast a cloud of the fields of air.

The painted walls were a mystic show
Of time's ebb-tide and overflow ;
His hoards long-locked and conquering **key**,
His service-fires that in heaven be,
And earth-wheels whirled perpetually.

Rose Mary gazed from the open door
As on idle things she cared not for,—
The fleeting shapes of an empty tale ;
Then stepped with a heedless visage **pale**,
And lifted aside the altar-veil.

The altar stood from its curved recess
In a coiling serpent's life-likeness :
Even such a serpent evermore
Lies deep asleep at the world's dark core
Till the last Voice shake the sea and shore.

From the altar-cloth a book rose spread
And tapers burned at the altar-head ;
And there in the altar-midst alone,
'Twixt wings of a sculptured beast unknown,
Rose Mary saw the Beryl-stone.

Firm it sat 'twixt the hollowed wings,
As an orb sits in the hand of kings :
And lo ! for that Foe whose curse far-flown
Had bound her life with a burning zone,
Rose Mary knew the Beryl-stone.

Dread is the meteor's blazing sphere
When the poles throb to its blind career ;
But not with a light more grim and ghast
Thereby is the future doom forecast,
Than now this sight brought back the past.

The hours and minutes seemed to whirr
In a clanging swarm that deafened her ;
They stung her heart to a writhing flame,
And marshaled past in its glare they came,—
Death and sorrow and sin and shame.

Round the Beryl's sphere she saw them pass
And mock her eyes from the fated glass :
One by one in a fiery train
The dead hours seemed to wax and wane,
And burned till all was known again.

From the drained heart's fount there rose no cry,
There sprang no tears, for the source was dry.
Held in the hand of some heavy law,
Her eyes she might not once withdraw
Nor shrink away from the thing she saw.

Even as she gazed, through all her blood
The flame was quenched in a coming flood :
Out of the depth of the hollow gloom
On her soul's bare sands she felt it boom,—
The measured tide of a sea of doom.

Three steps she took through the altar-gate,
And her neck reared and her arms grew straight :
The sinews clenched like a serpent's throe,
And the face was white in the dark hair's flow,
As her hate beheld what lay below.

Dumb she stood in her malisons,—
 A silver statue tressed with bronze :
 As the fatted head by Perseus mown,
 It seemed in sooth that her gaze alone
 Had turned the carven shapes to stone.

O'er the altar-sides on either hand
 There hung a dinted helm and brand :
 By strength thereof, 'neath the Sacred Sign,
 That bitter gift o'er the salt sea-brine
 Her father brought from Palestine.

Rose Mary moved with a stern accord
 And reached her hand to her father's sword ;
 Nor did she stir her gaze one whit
 From the thing whereon her brows were knit ;
 But gazing still, she spoke to it.

“ O ye, three times accurst,” she said,
 “ By whom this stone is tenanted !
 Lo ! here ye came by a strong sin's might ;
 Yet a sinner's hand that's weak to smite
 Shall send you hence ere the day be night.

“ This hour a clear voice bade me know
 My hand shall work your overthrow :
 Another thing in mine ear it spake,—
 With the broken spell my life shall break.
 I thank Thee, God, for the dear death's sake !

“ And he Thy heavenly minister
 Who swayed erewhile this spell-bound sphere,—
 My parting soul let him haste to greet,
 And none but he be guide for my feet
 To where Thy rest is made complete.”

Then deep she breathed, with a tender moan :—
 “ My love, my lord, my only one !
 Even as I held the cursed clue,
 When thee, through me, these foul ones slew,—
 By mine own deed shall they slay me too !

“Even while they speed to Hell, my love,
Two hearts shall meet in Heaven above.
Our shrift thou sought'st, but mightst not bring
And oh ! for me 'tis a blessed thing
To work hereby our ransoming.

“One were our hearts in joy and pain,
And our souls e'en now grow one again.
And O my love if our souls are three,
O thine and mine shall the third soul be,—
One threefold love eternally.”

Her eyes were soft as she spoke apart,
And the lips smiled to the broken heart :
But the glance was dark and the forehead scored
With the bitter frown of hate restored,
As her two hands swung the heavy sword.

Three steps back from her foe she trod : —
“Love, for thy sake ! In Thy Name, O God !”
In the fair white hands small strength was shown ;
Yet the blade flashed high and the edge fell
prone,
And she cleft the heart of the Beryl-stone.

What living flesh in the thunder-cloud
Hath sat and felt heaven cry aloud ?
Or known how the levin's pulse may beat ?
Or wrapped the hour when the whirlwinds meet
About its breast for a winding-sheet ?

Who hath crouched at the world's deep heart
While the earthquake rends its loins apart ?
Or walked far under the seething main
While overheard the heavens ordain
The tempest-towers of the hurricane ?

Who hath seen or what ear hath heard
The secret things unregistr'd
Of the place where all is past and done
And tears and laughter sound as one
In Hell's unhallowed unison ?

Nay, is it writ how the fiends despair
In earth and water and fire and air ?
Even so no mortal tongue may tell
How to the clang of the sword that fell
The echoes shook the altar-cell.

When all was still on the air again
The Beryl-stone lay cleft in twain ;
The veil was rent from the riven dome ;
And every wind that's winged to roam
Might have the ruined place for home.

The fountain no more glittered free ;
The fruit hung dead on the leafless tree ;
The flame of the lamp had ceased to flare ;
And the crystal casket shattered there
Was emptied now of its cloud of air.

And lo ! on the ground Rose Mary lay,
With a cold brow like the snows ere May,
With a cold breast like the earth till Spring,
With such a smile as the June days bring
When the year grows warm for harvesting.

The death she had won might leave no trace
On the soft sweet form and gentle face :
In a gracious sleep she seemed to lie ;
And over her head her hand on high
Held fast the sword she triumphed by.

'Twas then a clear voice said in the room : —
"Behold the end of the heavy doom.
O come,— for thy bitter love's sake blest ;
By a sweet path now thou journeyest,
And I will lead thee to thy rest.

"Me thy sin by Heaven's sore ban
Did chase awhile from the talisman :
But to my heart, a conquered home,
In glory of strength thy footsteps come
Who hast thus cast forth my foes therefrom.

"Already thy heart remembereth
 No more his name thou sought'st in death :
 For under all deeps, all heights above,—
 So wide the gulf in the midst thereof,—
 Are Hell of Treason and Heaven of Love.

"Thee, true soul, shall thy truth prefer
 To blessed Mary's rose-bower :
 Warmed and lit is thy place afar
 With guerdon-fires of the sweet Love-star
 Where hearts of steadfast lovers are :—

"Though naught for the poor corpse lying here
 Remain to-day but the cold white bier,
 But burial-chaunt and bended knee,
 But sighs and tears that heaviest be,
 But rent rose-flower and rosemary."

BERYL-SONG.

*We, cast forth from the Beryl,
 Gyre-circling spirits of fire,
 Whose pangs begin
 With God's grace to sin,
 For whose spent powers the immortal hours are sterile,—
 Woe! must We behold this mother
 Find grace in her dead child's face, and doubt of
 none other
 But that perfect pardon, alas! hath assured her guer-
 don?
 Woe! must We behold this daughter,
 Made clean from the soil of sin wherewith We had
 fraught her,
 Shake off a man's blood like water?
 Write up her story
 On the gate of Heaven's glory,
 Whom there We behold so fair in shining apparel,
 And beneath her the ruin*

Of our own undoing!

Alas, the Beryl!

We had for a foeman

But one weak woman;

In one day's strife,

Her hope fell dead from her life;

And yet no iron,

Her soul to environ,

Could this manslayer, this false soothsayer imperil!

Lo, where she bows

In the Holy House!

Who now shall dis sever her soul from its joy for ever,

While every ditty

Of love and plentiful pity

Fills the White City,

*And the floor of Heaven to her feet for ever is
given?*

Hark, a voice cries "Flee!"

Woe! woe! what shelter have We,

Whose pangs begin

With God's grace to sin,

For whose spent powers the immortal hours are sterile,

Gyre-circling spirits of fire,

We, cast forth from the Beryl?

THE WHITE SHIP.

HENRY I. OF ENGLAND.— 25TH NOV., 1120

By none but me can the tale be told,
The butcher of Rouen, poor Berold.
(Lands are swayed by a King on a throne.)
'Twas a royal train put forth to sea,
Yet the tale can be told by none but me.
(The sea hath no King but God alone.)

King Henry held it as life's whole gain
That after his death his son should reign.

'Twas so in my youth I heard men say,
And my old age calls it back to-day.

King Henry of England's realm was he,
And Henry Duke of Normandy.

The times had changed when on either coast
"Clerkly Harry" was all his boast.

Of ruthless strokes full many an one
He had struck to crown himself and his son ;
And his elder brother's eyes were gone.

And when to the chase his court would crowd,
The poor flung plowshares on his road,
And shrieked : " Our cry is from King to God ! "

But all the chiefs of the English land
Had knelt and kissed the Prince's hand.

And next with his son he sailed to France
To claim the Norman allegiance :

And every baron in Normandy
Had taken the oath of fealty.

'Twas sworn and sealed, and the day had come
When the King and the Prince might journey home :

For Christmas cheer is to home hearts dear,
And Christmas now was drawing near.

Stout Fitz-Stephen came to the King,—
A pilot famous in seafaring ;

And he held to the King, in all men's sight,
A mark of gold for his tribute's right.

"Liege Lord ! my father guided the ship
From whose boat your father's foot did slip
When he caught the English soil in his grip,

"And cried : ' By this clasp I claim command
O'er every rood of English land !'

"He was borne to the realm you rule o'er now
In that ship with the archer carved at her prow

"And thither I'll bear, an' it be my due,
Your father's son and his grandson too.

"The famed White Ship is mine in the bay ;
From Harfleur's harbor she sails to-day,

"With masts fair-pennoned as Norman spears
And with fifty well-trying mariners."

Quoth the King : " My ships are chosen each one,
But I'll not say nay to Stephen's son.

" My son and daughter and fellowship
Shall cross the water in the White Ship."

The King set sail with the eve's south wind,
And soon he left that coast behind.

The Prince and all his, a princely show,
Remained in the good White Ship to go.

With noble knights and with ladies fair,
With courtiers and sailors gathered there,
Three hundred living souls we were :

And I Berold was the meanest hind
In all that train to the Prince assign'd.

The Prince was a lawless shameless youth ;
From his father's loins he sprang without ruth :

Eighteen years till then he had seen,
And the devil's dues in him were eighteen.

And now he cried : " Bring wine from below ;
Let the sailors revel ere yet they row :

" Our speed shall o'ertake my father's flight
Though we sail from the harbor at midnight."

The rowers made good cheer without check ;
The lords and ladies obeyed his beck ;
The night was light, and they danced on the deck.

But at midnight's stroke they cleared the bay,
And the White Ship furrowed the water-way.

The sails were set, and the oars kept tune
To the double flight of the ship and the moon :

Swifter and swifter the White Ship sped
Till she flew as the spirit flies from the dead :

As white as a lily glimmered she
Like a ship's fair ghost upon the sea.

And the Prince cried, " Friends, 'tis the hour to
sing !
Is a songbird's course so swift on the wing ? "

And under the winter stars' still throng,
From brown throats, white throats, merry and
strong,
The knights and the ladies raised a song.

A song,— nay, a shriek that rent the sky,
That leaped o'er the deep! — the grievous cry
Of three hundred living that now must die.

An instant shriek that sprang to the shock
As the ship's keel felt the sunken rock.

'Tis said that afar — a shrill strange sigh —
The King's ships heard it and knew not why.

Pale Fitz-Stephen stood by the helm
'Mid all those folk that the waves must whelm.

A great King's heir for the waves to whelm,
And the helpless pilot pale at the helm!

The ship was eager and sucked athirst,
By the stealthy stab of the sharp reef pierc'd:

And like the moil round a sinking cup,
The waters against her crowded up.

A moment the pilot's senses spin,—
The next he snatched the prince 'mid the din,
Cut the boat loose, and the youth leaped in.

A few friends leaped with him, standing near.
"Row! the sea's smooth and the night is clear?"

"What! none to be saved but these and I?"
"Row, row as you'd live! All here must die!"

Out of the churn of the choking ship,
Which the gulf grapples and the waves strip,
They struck with the strained oars' flash and dip.

'Twas then o'er the splitting bulwarks' brim
The Prince's sister screamed to him.

He gazed aloft, still rowing apace,
And through the whirled surf he knew her face.

To the toppling decks clave one and all
As a fly cleaves to a chamber-wall.

I Berold was clinging anear ;
I prayed for myself and quaked with fear,
But I saw his eyes as he looked at her.

He knew her face and he heard her cry,
And he said, " Put back ! she must not die ! "

And back with the current's force they reel
Like a leaf that's drawn to a water-wheel.

'Neath the ship's travail they scarce might float.
But he rose and stood in the rocking boat.

Low the poor ship leaned on the tide :
O'er the naked keel as she best might slide,
The sister toiled to the brother's side.

He reached an oar to her from below,
And stiffened his arms to clutch her so.

But now from the ship some spied the boat,
And " saved ! " was the cry from many a throat.

And down to the boat they leaped and fell :
It turned as a bucket turns in a well,
And nothing was there but the surge and swell.

The Prince that was and the King to come,
There in an instant gone to his doom,

Despite of all England's bended knee
And mauler the Norman fealty !

He was a Prince of lust and pride ;
He showed no grace till the hour he died.

When he should be King, he oft would vow,
He'd yoke the peasant to his own plow.
O'er him the ships score their furrows now.

God only knows where his soul did wake,
But I saw him die for his sister's sake.

By none but me can the tale be told,
The butcher of Rouen, poor Berold.
(Lands are swayed by a King on a throne.)

'Twas a royal train put forth to sea,
Yet the tale can be told by none but me.
(The sea hath no King but God alone.)

And now the end came o'er the waters' womb
Like the last great Day that's yet to come.

With prayers in vain and curses in vain,
The White Ship sundered on the mid-main :

And what were men and what was a ship
Were toys and splinters in the sea's grip.

I Berold was down in the sea ;
And passing strange though the thing may be,
Of dreams then known I remember me.

Blithe is the shout on Harfleur's strand
When morning lights the sails to land :

And blithe is Honfleur's echoing gloam
When mothers call the children home :

And high do the bells of Rouen beat
When the body of Christ goes down the street.

These things and the like were heard and shown
In a moment's trance 'neath the sea alone ;

And when I rose, 'twas the sea did seem,
And not these things, to be all a dream.

The ship was gone and the crowd was gone,
And the deep shuddered and the moon shone :

And in a strait grasp my arms did span
The mainyard rent from the mast where it ran ;
And on it with me was another man.

Where lands were none 'neath the dim sea-sky,
We told our names, that man and I.

"O I am Godefroy de l'Aigle hight,
And son am I to a belted knight."

"And I am Berold the butcher's son
Who slays the beasts in Rouen town."

Then cried we upon God's name, as we
Did drift on the bitter winter sea.

But lo ! a third man rose o'er the wave,
And we said, "Thank God ! us three may He save !"

He clutched to the yard with panting stare,
And we looked and knew Fitz-Stephen there.

He clung, and "What of the Prince ?" quoth he.
"Lost, lost !" we cried. He cried, "Woe on me !"
And loosed his hold and sank through the sea.

And soul with soul again in that space
We two were together face to face :

And each knew each, as the moments sped,
Less for one living than for one dead :

And every still star overhead
Seemed an eye that knew we were but dead.

And the hours passed ; till the noble's son
Sighed, " God be thy help ! my strength's fordone !

" O farewell, friend, for I can no more !"
" Christ take thee ! " I moaned ; and his life was o'er.

Three hundred souls were all lost but one,
And I drifted over the sea alone.

At last the morning rose on the sea
Like an angel's wing that beat tow'ards me.

Sore numbed was I in my sheepskin coat ;
Half dead I hung, and might nothing note,
Till I woke sun-warmed in a fisher-boat.

The sun was high o'er the eastern brim
As I praised God and gave thanks to Him.

That day I told my tale to a priest,
Who charged me, till the shrift were releas'd,
That I should keep it in mine own breast.

And with the priest I thence did fare
To King Henry's court at Winchester.

We spoke with the King's high chamberlain,
And he wept and mourned again and again,
As if his own son had been slain :

And round us ever there crowded fast
Great men with faces all aghast :

And who so bold that might tell the thing
Which now they knew to their lord the King ?
Much woe I learnt in their communing.

The King had watched with a heart sore stirred
For two whole days, and this was the third :

And still to all his court would he say,
" What keeps my son so long away ? "

And they said : " The ports lie far and wide
That skirt the swell of the English tide ;

" And England's cliffs are not more white
Than her women are, and scarce so light
Her skies as their eyes are blue and bright ;

" And in some port that he reached from France
The Prince has lingered for his pleasure."

But once the King asked : " What distant cry
Was that we heard 'twixt the sea and sky ?"

And one said : " With such-like shouts, pardie !
Do the fishers fling their nets at sea."

And one : " Who knows not the shrieking quest
When the sea-mew misses its young from the nest ?"

'Twas thus till now they had soothed his dread,
Albeit they knew not what they said :

But who should speak to-day of the thing
That all knew there except the King ?

Then pondering much they found a way,
And met round the King's high seat that day :

And the King sat with a heart sore stirred,
And seldom he spoke and seldom heard.

'Twas then through the hall the King was 'ware
Of a little boy with golden hair,

As bright as the golden poppy is
That the beach breeds for the surf to kiss :

Yet pale his cheek as the thorn in Spring,
And his garb black like the raven's wing.

Nothing heard but his foot through the hall,
For now the lords were silent all.

And the King wondered, and said, "Alack !
Who sends me a fair boy dressed in black ?

"Why, sweet heart, do you pace through the hall
As though my court were a funeral ?"

Then lowly knelt the child at the dais,
And looked up weeping in the King's face.

"O wherefore black, O King, ye may say,
For white is the hue of death to-day.

"Your son and all his fellowship
Lie low in the sea with the White Ship."

King Henry fell as a man struck dead ;
And speechless still he stared from his bed
When to him next day my rede I read.

There's many an hour must needs beguile
A King's high heart that he should smile,—

Full many a lordly hour, full fain
Of his realm's rule and pride of his reign :—

But this King never smiled again.

By none but me can the tale be told,
The butcher of Rouen, poor Berold.

(Lands are swayed by a King on a throne.)

'Twas a royal train put forth to sea,
Yet the tale can be told by none but me.

(The sea hath no King but God alone.)

THE KING'S TRAGEDY.

JAMES I. OF SCOTS.—20TH FEBRUARY, 1437.

NOTE.—Tradition says that Catharine Douglas, in honor of her heroic act when she barred the door with her arm against the murderers of James the First of Scots, received popularly the name of "Barlass." This name remains to her descendants, the Barlas family, in Scotland, who bear for their crest a broken arm. She married Alexander Lovell of Bolunnie.

A few stanzas from King James's lovely poem, known as *The King's Quhair*, are quoted in the course of this ballad. The writer must express regret for the necessity which has compelled him to shorten the ten-syllabled lines to eight syllables, in order that they might harmonize with the ballad meter.

I CATHERINE am a Douglas born,
A name to all Scots dear;
And Kate Barlass they've called me now
Through many a waning year.

This old arm's withered now. 'Twas once
Most deft 'mong maidens all
To rein the steed, to wing the shaft,
To smite the palm-play ball.

In hall adown the close-linked dance
It has shone most white and fair;
It has been the rest for a true lord's head,
And many a sweet babe's nursing-bed,
And the bar to a King's chambère.

Ay, lasses, draw round Kate Barlass,
And hark with bated breath
How good King James, King Robert's son,
Was foully done to death.

Through all the days of his gallant youth
The princely James was pent,
By his friends at first and then by his foes,
In long imprisonment.

For the elder Prince, the kingdom's heir,
By treason's murderous brood
Was slain ; and the father quaked for the child
With the royal mortal blood.

I' the Bass Rock fort, by his father's care,
Was his childhood's life assured ;
And Henry the subtle Bolingbroke,
Proud England's King, 'neath the southron yoke
His youth for long years immured.

Yet in all things meet for a kingly man
Himself did he approve ;
And the nightingale through his prison-wall
Taught him both lore and love.

For once, when the bird's song drew him close
To the opened window-pane,
In her bowers beneath a lady stood,
A light of life to his sorrowful mood,
Like a lily amid the rain.

And for her sake, to the sweet bird's note,
He framed a sweeter Song,
More sweet than ever a poet's heart
Gave yet to the English tongue.

She was a lady of royal blood ;
And when, past sorrow and teen,
He stood where still through his crownless years
His Scottish realm had been,
At Scone were the happy lovers crowned,
A heart-wed King and Queen.

But the bird may fall from the bough of youth,
And song be turned to moan.

And Love's storm-cloud be the shadow of Hate,
When the tempest-waves of a troubled State
Are beating against a throne.

Yet well they loved ; and the god of Love,
Whom well the King had sung,
Might find on earth no truer hearts
His lowliest swains among.

From the days when first she rode abroad
With Scottish maids in her train,
I Catherine Douglas won the trust
Of my mistress sweet Queen Jane.

And oft she sighed, "To be born a King !"
And oft along the way
When she saw the homely lovers pass
She has said, "Alack the day !"

Years waned,— the loving and toiling years :
Till England's wrong renewed
Drove James, by outrage cast on his crown,
To the open field of feud.

'Twas when the King and his host were met
At the leaguer of Roxbro' hold,
The Queen o' the sudden sought his camp
With a tale of dread to be told.

And she showed him a secret letter writ
That spoke of treasonous strife,
And how a band of his noblest lords
Were sworn to take his life.

"And it may be here or it may be there,
In the camp or the court," she said :
"But for my sake come to your people's arms
And guard your royal head."

Quoth he, "'Tis the fifteenth day of the siege,
And the castle 's nigh to yield."

"O face your foes on your throne," she cried,
"And show the power you wield ;
And under your Scottish people's love
You shall sit as under your shield."

At the fair Queen's side I stood that day
When he bade them raise the siege,
And back to his Court he sped to know
How the lords would meet their Liege.

But when he summoned his Parliament,
The louring brows hung round,
Like clouds that circle the mountain-head
Ere the first low thunders sound.

For he had tamed the nobles' lust
And curbed their power and pride,
And reached out an arm to right the poor
Through Scotland far and wide ;
And may a lordly wrong-doer
By the headsman's ax had died.

'Twas then upspoke Sir Robert Græme,
The bold o'ermastering man : —
"O King, in the name of your Three Estates
I set you under their ban !

"For, as your lords made oath to you
Of service and fealty,
Even in like wise you pledged your oath
Their faithful sire to be : —

"Yet all we here that are nobly sprung
Have mourned dear kith and kin
Since first for the Scottish Barons' curse
Did your bloody rule begin."
With that he laid his hands on his King : —
"Is this not so, my lords ?"
But of all who had sworn to league with him
Not one spake back to his words.

Quoth the King : — “ Thou speak'st but for one Estate
Nor doth it avow thy gage.
Let my liege lords hale this traitor hence ! ”
The Græme fired dark with rage : —
“ Who works for lesser men than himself,
He earns but a witless wage ! ”

But soon from the dungeon where he lay
He won by privy plots,
And forth he fled with a price on his head
To the country of the Wild Scots.

And word there came from Sir Robert Græme
To the King at Edinbro' : —
“ No Liege of mine thou art ; but I see
From this day forth alone in thee
God's creature, my mortal foe.

“ Through thee are my wife and children lost,
My heritage and lands ;
And when my God shall show me a way,
Thyself my mortal foe will I slay
With these my proper hands.”

Against the coming of Christmastide
That year the King bade call
I' the Black Friars' Charterhouse of Perth
A solemn festival.

And we of his household rode with him
In a close-ranked company ;
But not till the sun had sunk from his throne
Did we reach the Scottish Sea.

That eve was clenched for a boding storm,
'Neath a toilsome moon half seen ;
The cloud stooped low and the surf rose high
And where there was a line of the sky,
Wild wings loomed dark between.

And on a rock of the black beach-side,
By the veiled moon dimly lit,
There was something seemed to heave with life
As the King drew nigh to it.

And was it only the tossing furze
Or brake of the waste sea-wold?
Or was it an eagle bent to the blast?
When near we came, we knew it at last
For a woman tattered and old.

But it seemed as though by a fire within
Her writhen limbs were wrung;
And as soon as the King was close to her,
She stood up gaunt and strong.

'Twas then the moon sailed clear of the rack
On high in her hollow dome;
And still as aloft with hoary crest
Each clamorous wave rang home,
Like fire in snow the moonlight blazed
Amid the champing foam.

And the woman held his eyes with her eyes:—
“O King, thou art come at last;
But thy wraith has haunted the Scottish Sea
To my sight for four years past.

“Four years it is since first I met,
’Twixt the Duchray and the Dhu,
A shape whose feet clung close in a shroud,
And that shape for thine I knew.

“A year again, and on Inchkeith Isle
I saw thee pass in the breeze,
With the cerecloth risen above thy feet
And wound about thy knees.

“And yet a year, in the Links of Forth,
As a wanderer without rest,
Thou cam’st with both thine arms i’ the shroud
That clung high up thy breast.

“And in this hour I find thee here,
And well mine eyes may note
That the winding-sheet hath passed thy breast
And risen around thy throat.

“And when I meet thee again, O King,
That of death hast such sore drouth,—
Except thou turn again on this shore,—
The winding-sheet shall have moved once more
And covered thine eyes and mouth.

“O King, whom poor men bless for their King,
Of thy fate be not so fain ;
But these my words for God’s message take,
And turn thy steed, O King, for her sake
Who rides beside thy rein !”

While the woman spoke, the King’s horse reared
As if it would breast the sea,
And the Queen turned pale as she heard on the
gale
The voice die dolorously.

When the woman ceased, the steed was still,
But the King gazed on her yet,
And in silence save for the wail of the sea
His eyes and her eyes met.

At last he said : — “ God’s ways are His own ;
Man is but shadow and dust.
Last night I prayed by His altar-stone ;
To-night I wend to the Feast of His Son ;
And in Him I set my trust.

“I have held my people in sacred charge,
And have not feared the sting
Of proud men’s hate,— to His will resign’d
Who has but one same death for a hind
And one same death for a King.

“And if God in His wisdom have brought close
The day when I must die,
That day by water or fire or air
My feet shall fall in the destined snare
Wherever my road may lie.

“What man can say but the Fiend hath set
Thy sorcery on my path,
My heart with the fear of death to fill,
And turn me against God's very will
To sink in His burning wrath?”

The woman stood as the train rode past,
And moved nor limb nor eye ;
And when we were shipped, we saw her there
Still standing against the sky.

As the ship made way, the moon once more
Sank slow in her rising pall ;
And I thought of the shrouded wraith of the King,
And I said, “The Heavens know all.”

And now, ye lasses, must ye hear
How my name is Kate Barlass : —
But a little thing, when all the tale
Is told of the weary mass
Of crime and woe which in Scotland's realm
God's will let come to pass.

'Twas in the Charterhouse of Perth
That the King and all his Court
Were met, the Christmas Feast being done,
For solace and disport.

'Twas a wind-wild eve in February,
And against the casement pane
The branches smote like summoning hands
And muttered the driving rain.

And when the wind swooped over the lift
And made the whole heaven frown,
It seemed a grip was laid on the walls
To tug the housetop down.

And the Queen was there, more stately fair
Than a lily in garden set ;
And the King was loth to stir from her side ;
For as on the day when she was his bride,
Even so he loved her yet.

And the Earl of Athole, the King's false friend,
Sat with him at the board ;
And Robert Stuart the chamberlain
Who had sold his sovereign Lord.

Yet the traitor Christopher Chaumber there
Would fain have told him all,
And vainly four times that night he strove
To reach the King through the hall.

But the wine is bright at the goblet's brim
Though the poison lurk beneath ;
And the apples still are red on the tree
Within whose shade may the adder be
That shall turn thy life to death.

There was a knight of the King's fast friends
Whom he called the King of Love ;
And to such bright cheer and courtesy
That name might best behoove.

And the King and Queen both loved him well
For his gentle knightliness ;
And with him the King, as that eve wore on,
Was playing at the chess.

And the King said, (for he thought to jest
And soothe the Queen thereby ;) —
“ In a book 't is writ that this same year
A King shall in Scotland die.

“And I have pondered the matter o’er,
And this have I found, Sir Hugh,—
There are but two Kings on Scottish ground,
And those Kings are I and you.

“And I have a wife and a newborn heir,
And you are yourself alone ;
So stand you stark at my side with me
To guard our double throne.

“For here sit I and my wife and child,
As well your heart shall approve,
In full surrender and soothfastness,
Beneath your Kingdom of Love.”

And the Knight laughed, and the Queen too smiled ;
But I knew her heavy thought,
And I strove to find in the good King’s jest
What cheer might thence be wrought.

And I said, “My Liege, for the Queen’s dear love
Now sing the song that of old
You made, when a captive Prince you lay,
And the nightingale sang sweet on the spray,
In Windsor’s castle-hold.”

Then he smiled the smile I knew so well
When he thought to please the Queen ;
The smile which under all bitter frowns
Of hate that rose between,
Forever dwelt at the poet’s heart
Like the bird of love unseen.

And he kissed her hand and took his harp,
And the music sweetly rang ;
And when the song burst forth, it seemed
’Twas the nightingale that sang.

“Worship, ye lovers, on this May :
Of bliss your kalends are begun :
Sing with us, Away, Winter, away !

*Come, Summer, the sweet season and sun !
 Awake for shame,— your heaven is won,—
 And amorously your heads lift all :
 Thank Love, that you to his grace doth call !”*

But when he bent to the Queen, and sang
 The speech whose praise was hers,
 It seemed his voice was the voice of the Spring
 And the voice of the bygone years.

*“ The fairest and the freshest flower
 That ever I saw before that hour,
 The which o’ the sudden made to start
 The blood of my body to my heart.*

* * * * *

*Ah sweet, are ye a worldly creature
 Or heavenly thing in form of nature ?”*

And the song was long, and richly stored
 With wonder and beauteous things ;
 And the harp was tuned to every change
 Of minstrel ministerings ;
 But when he spoke of the Queen at the last
 Its strings were his own heart-strings.

*“ Unworthy but only of her grace,
 Upon Lovè’s rock that’s easy and sure,
 In guerdon of all my lovè’s space
 She took me her humble creature.
 Thus fell my blissful adventure
 In youth of love that from day to day
 Flowereth aye new, and further I say.*

*“ To reckon all the circumstance
 As it happed when lessen gan my sore,
 Of my rancor and woeful chance,
 It were too long,— I have done therefor.
 And of this flower I say no more
 But unto my help her heart hath tended
 And even from death her man defended.”*

“Ay, even from death,” to myself I said ;
 For I thought of the day when she
 Had borne him the news, at Roxbro’ siege,
 Of the fell confederacy.

But Death even then took aim as he sang
 With an arrow deadly bright ;
 And the grinning skull lurked grimly aloof,
 And the wings were spread far over the roof
 More dark than the winter night.

Yet truly along the amorous song
 Of Love’s high pomp and state,
 There were words of Fortune’s trackless doom
 And the dreadful face of Fate.

And oft have I heard again in dreams
 The voice of dire appeal
 In which the King then sang of the pit
 That is under Fortune’s wheel.

*“And under the wheel beheld I there
 An ugly Pit as deep as hell,
 That to behold I quaked for fear :
 And this I heard, that who therein fell
 Came no more up, tidings to tell :
 Whereat, astound of the fearful sight,
 I wist not what to do for fright.”*

And oft has my thought called up again
 These words of the changeful song : —
*“Wist thou thy pain and thy travail
 To come, well mightst thou weep and wail !”*
 And our wail, O God ! is long.

But the song’s end was all of his love ;
 And well his heart was grac’d
 With her smiling lips and her tear-bright eyes
 As his arm went round her waist.

And on the swell of her long fair throat
Close clung the necklet-chain
As he bent her pearl-tir'd head aside,
And in the warmth of his love and pride
He kissed her lips full fain.

And her true face was a rosy red,
The very red of the rose
That, couched on the happy garden-bed,
In the summer sunlight glows.

And all the wondrous things of love
That sang so sweet through the song
Were in the look that met in their eyes,
And the look was deep and long.

'Twas then a knock came at the outer gate,
And the usher sought the King.
"The woman you met by the Scottish Sea,
My Liege, would tell you a thing ;
And she says that her present need for speech
Will bear no gainsaying."

And the King said : "The hour is late ;
To-morrow will serve, I ween."
Then he charged the usher strictly, and said :
"No word of this to the Queen."

But the usher came again to the King.
"Shall I call her back ?" quoth he :
"For as she went on her way, she cried,
'Woe ! Woe ! then the thing must be !'"

And the King paused, but he did not speak.
Then he called for the Voidee-cup :
And as he heard the twelfth hour strike,
There by true lips and false lips alike
Was the draught of trust drained up.

So with reverence meet to King and Queen,
To bed went all from the board ;

And the last to leave of the courtly train
Was Robert Stuart the chamberlain
Who had sold his sovereign lord.

And all the locks of the chamber-door
Had the traitor riven and brast ;
And that Fate might win sure way from afar,
He had drawn out every bolt and bar
That made the entrance fast.

And now at midnight he stole his way
To the moat of the outer wall,
And laid strong hurdles closely across
Where the traitors' tread should fall.

But we that were the Queen's bower-maids
Alone were left behind ;
And with heed we drew the curtains close
Against the winter wind.

And now that all was still through the hall,
More clearly we heard the rain
That clamored ever against the glass
And the boughs that beat on the pane.

But the fire was bright in the ingle-nook,
And through empty space around
The shadows cast on the arras'd wall
'Mid the pictured kings stood sudden and tall
Like specters sprung from the ground.

And the bed was dight in a deep alcove ;
And as he stood by the fire
The king was still in talk with the Queen
While he doffed his goodly attire.

And the song had brought the image back
Of many a bygone year ;
And many a loving word they said
With hand in hand and head laid to head ;
And none of us went anear,

But love was weeping outside the house,
A child in the piteous rain ;
And as he watched the arrow of Death,
He wailed for his own shafts close in the sheath
That never should fly again.

And now beneath the window arose
A wild voice suddenly :
And the King reared straight, but the Queen fell back
As for bitter dule to dree ;
And all of us knew the woman's voice
Who spoke by the Scottish Sea.

"O King," she cried, "in an evil hour
They drove me from thy gate ;
And yet my voice must rise to thine ears ;
But alas ! it comes too late !

"Last night at mid-watch, by Aberdour,
When the moon was dead in the skies,
O King, in a death-light of thine own
I saw thy shape arise.

"And in full season, as erst I said,
The doom had gained its growth ;
And the shroud had risen above thy neck
And covered thine eyes and mouth.

"And no moon woke, but the pale dawn broke,
And still thy soul stood there ;
And I thought its silence cried to my soul
As the first rays crowned its hair.

"Since then have I journeyed fast and fain
In very despite of Fate,
Lest Hope might still be found in God's will :
But they drove me from thy gate.

"For every man on God's ground, O King,
His death grows up from his birth

In a shadow-plant perpetually ;
And thine towers high, a black yew-tree,
O'er the Charterhouse of Perth !”

That room was built far out from the house ;
And none but we in the room
Might hear the voice that rose beneath,
Nor the tread of the coming doom.

For now there came a torchlight-glare,
And a clang of arms there came ;
And not a soul in that space but thought
Of the foe Sir Robert Græme.

Yea, from the country of the Wild Scots,
O'er mountain, valley, and glen,
He had brought with him in murderous league
Three hundred armed men.

The King knew all in an instant's flash,
And like a King did he stand ;
But there was no armor in all the room,
Nor weapon lay to his hand.

And all we women flew to the door
And thought to have made it fast ;
But the bolts were gone and the bars were gone
And the locks were riven and brast.

And he caught the pale pale Queen in his arms
As the iron footsteps fell,—
Then loosed her, standing alone, and said,
“ Our bliss was our farewell ! ”

And 'twixt his lips he murmured a prayer,
And he crossed his brow and breast ;
And proudly in royal hardihood
Even so with folded arms he stood,—
The prize of the bloody quest.

Then on me leaped the Queen like a deer :—

“O Catherine, help !” she cried,
And low at his feet we clasped his knees
Together side by side.

“Oh ! even a King, for his people's sake,
From treasonous death must hide !”

“For *her* sake most !” I cried, and I marked
The pang that my words could wring.
And the iron tongs from the chimney-nook
I snatched and held to the King :—
“Wrench up the plank ! and the vault beneath
Shall yield safe harboring.”

With brows low-bent, from my eager hand
The heavy heft did he take ;
And the plank at his feet he wrenched and tore ;
And as he frowned through the open floor,
Again I said, “For her sake !”

Then he cried to the Queen, “God's will be done !”
For her hands were clasped in prayer.
And down he sprang to the inner crypt ;
And straight we closed the plank he had ripp'd
And toiled to smoothe it fair.

(Alas ! in that vault a gap once was
Wherethro' the King might have fled :
But three days since close-walled had it been
By his will ; for the ball would roll therein
When without at the palm he play'd.)

Then the Queen cried, “Catherine, keep the door,
And I to this will suffice !”
At her word I rose all dazed to my feet,
And my heart was fire and ice.

And louder ever the voices grew,
And the tramp of men in mail ;
Until to my brain it seemed to be
As though I tossed on a ship at sea
In the teeth of a crashing gale.

Then back I flew to the rest ; and hard
We strove with sinews knit
To force the table against the door ;
But we might not accomplish it.

Then my wild gaze sped far down the hall
To the place of the hearthstone-sill ;
And the Queen bent ever above the floor,
For the plank was rising still.

And now the rush was heard on the stair,
And "God, what help?" was our cry.
And was I frenzied or was I bold ?
I looked at each empty stanchion-hold,
And no bar but my arm had I !

Like iron felt my arm, as through
The staple I made it pass : —
Alack ! it was flesh and bone — no more !
'Twas Catherine Douglas sprang to the door,
But I fell back Kate Barlass.

With that they all thronged into the hall,
Half dim to my failing ken ;
And the space that was but a void before
Was a crowd of wrathful men.

Behind the door I had fall'n and lay,
Yet my sense was wildly aware,
And for all the pain of my shattered arm
I never fainted there.

Even as I fell, my eyes were cast
Where the King leaped down to the pit ;
And lo ! the plank was smooth in its place,
And the Queen stood far from it.

And under the litters and through the bed
And within the presses all
The traitors sought for the King, and pierced
The arras around the wall.

And through the chamber they ramped and stormed
Like lions loose in the lair,
And scarce could trust to their very eyes,—
For behold ! no King was there.

Then one of them seized the Queen, and cried,—
“Now tell us, where is thy lord?”
And he held the sharp point over her heart :
She drooped not her eyes nor did she start,
But she answered never a word.

Then the sword half pierced the true true breast :
But it was the Græme's own son
Cried, “This is a woman,— we seek a man !”
And away from her girdle-zone
He struck the point of the murderous steel ;
And that foul deed was not done.

And forth flowed all the throng like a sea,
And 'twas empty space once more ;
And my eyes sought out the wounded Queen
As I lay behind the door.

And I said : “Dear Lady, leave me here,
For I cannot help you now ;
But fly while you may, and none shall reck
Of my place here lying low.”

And she said, “My Catherine, God help thee !”
Then she looked to the distant floor,
And clasping her hands, “O God help *him*,”
She sobbed, “for we can no more !”

But God He knows what help may mean,
If it mean to live or to die ;
And what sore sorrow and mighty moan
On earth it may cost ere yet a throne
Be filled in His house on high.

And now the ladies fled with the Queen ;
And through the open door
The night-wind wailed round the empty room
And the rushes shook on the floor.

And the bed drooped low in the dark recess
Whence the arras was rent away ;
And the firelight still shone over the space
Where our hidden secret lay.

And the rain had ceased, and the moonbeams lit
The window high in the wall,—
Bright beams that on the plank that I knew
Through the painted pane did fall
And gleamed with the splendor of Scotland's
crown
And shield armorial.

But then a great wind swept up the skies,
And the climbing moon fell back ;
And the royal blazon fled from the floor,
And naught remained on its track ;
And high in the darkened window-pane
The shield and the crown were black.

And what I say next I partly saw
And partly I heard in sooth,
And partly since from the murderers' lips
The torture wrung the truth.

For now again came the armèd tread,
And fast through the hall it fell ;
But the throng was less ; and ere I saw,
By the voice without I could tell
That Robert Stuart had come with them
Who knew that chamber well.

And over the space the Græme strode dark
With his mantle round him flung :
And in his eye was a flaming light
But not a word on his tongue.

And Stuart held a torch to the floor,
And he found the thing he sought ;
And they slashed the plank away with their swords
And O God ! I fainted not !

And the traitor held his torch in the gap,
All smoking and smoldering ;
And through the vapor and fire, beneath
In the dark crypt's narrow ring,
With a shout that pealed to the room's high roof
They saw their naked King.

Half naked he stood, but stood as one
Who yet could do and dare :
With the crown, the King was stript away,—
The Knight was reft of his battle-array,—
But still the Man was there.

From the rout then stepped a villain forth,—
Sir John Hall was his name ;
With a knife unsheathed he leapt to the vault
Beneath the torchlight-flame.

Of his person and statue was the King
A man right manly strong,
And mightily by the shoulder-blades
His foe to his feet he flung.

Then the traitor's brother, Sir Thomas Hall,
Sprang down to work his worst ;
And the King caught the second man by the neck
And flung him above the first.

And he smote and trampled them under him ;
And a long month thence they bare
All black their throats with the grip of his hands
When the hangman's hand came there.

And sore he strove to have had their knives,
But the sharp blades gashed his hands.

Oh James ! so armed, thou hadst battled there
Till help had come of thy bands ;
And oh ! once more thou hadst held our throne
And ruled thy Scottish hands !

But while the King o'er his foe still raged
With a heart that naught could tame,
Another man sprang down to the crypt ;
And with his sword in his hand hard-gripp'd,
There stood Sir Robert Græme.

(Now shame on the recreant traitor's heart
Who durst not face his King
Till the body unarmed was wearied out
With two-fold combating !

Ah ! well might the people sing and say,
As oft ye have heard aright :—
“ *O Robert Græme, O Robert Græme,
Who slew our King, God give thee shame !* ”
For he slew him not as a knight.)

And the naked King turned round at bay,
But his strength had passed the goal,
And he could but gasp: —“ Mine hour is come ;
But oh ! to succor thine own soul's doom,
Let a priest now shrive my soul ! ”

And the traitor looked on the King's spent strength,
And said: —“ Have I kept my word ? —
Yea, King, the mortal pledge that I gave ?
No black friar's shrift thy soul shall have,
But the shrift of this red sword ! ”

With that he smote his King through the breast ;
And all they three in that pen
Fell on him and stabbed and stabbed him there
Like merciless murderous men.

Yet seemed it now that Sir Robert Græme,
Ere the King's last breath was o'er,
Turned sick at heart with the deadly sight
And would have done no more.

But a cry came from the troop above :—
“ If him thou do not slay,
The price of his life that thou dost spare
Thy forfeit life shall pay ! ”

O God ! what more did I hear or see,
Or how should I tell the rest ?
But there at length our King lay slain
With sixteen wounds in his breast.

O God ! and now did a bell boom forth,
And the murderers turned and fled ; —
Too late, too late, O God, did it sound ! —
And I heard the true men mustering round,
And the cries and the coming tread.

But ere they came, to the black death-gap
Somewise did I creep and steal ;
And lo ! or ever I swooned away,
Through the dusk I saw where the white face lay
In the Pit of Fortune's Wheel.

And now, ye Scottish maids who have heard
Dread things of the days grown old, —
Even at the last, of true Queen Jane
May somewhat yet be told,
And how she dealt for her dear lord's sake
Dire vengeance manifold.

'Twas in the Charterhouse of Perth,
In the fair-lit Death-chapelle,
That the slain King's corpse on bier was laid
With chaunt and requiem-knell.

And all with royal wealth of balm
Was the body purified ;
And none could trace on the brow and lips
The death that he had died.

In his robes of state he lay asleep
With orb and scepter in hand ;
And by the crown he wore on his throne
Was his kingly forehead spann'd.

And, girls, 'twas a sweet sad thing to see
How the curling golden hair,
As in the day of the poet's youth,
From the King's crown clustered there.

And if all had come to pass in the brain
That throbb'd beneath those curls,
Then Scots had said in the days to come
That this their soil was a different home
And a different Scotland, girls !

And the Queen sat by him night and day,
And oft she knelt in prayer,
All wan and pale in the widow's veil
That shrouded her shining hair.

And I had got good help of my hurt :
And only to me some sign
She made ; and save the priests that were there
No face would she see but mine.

And the month of March wore on apace ,
And now fresh couriers fared
Still from the country of the Wild Scots
With news of the traitors snared.

And still as I told her day by day,
Her pallor changed to sight,
And the frost grew to a furnace-flame
That burnt her visage white.

And evermore as I brought her word,
She bent to her dead King James,
And in the cold ear with fire-drawn breath
She spoke the traitors' names.

But when the name of Sir Robert Græme
Was the one she had to give,
I ran to hold her up from the floor ;
For the froth was on her lips, and sore
I feared that she could not live.

And the month of March wore nigh to its end,
And still was the death-pall spread ;
For she would not bury her slaughtered lord
Till his slayers all were dead.

And now of their dooms dread tidings came,
And of torments fierce and dire ;
And naught she spake,— she had ceased to speak,—
But her eyes were a soul on fire.

But when I told her the bitter end
Of the stern and just award,
She leaned o'er the bier, and thrice three times
She kissed the lips of her lord.

And then she said,— “ My King, they are dead ! ”
And she knelt on the chapel-floor,
And whispered low with a strange proud smile,—
“ James, James, they suffered more ! ”

Last she stood up to her queenly height,
But she shook like an autumn leaf,
As though the fire wherein she burned
Then left her body, and all were turned
To winter of life-long grief.

And “ O James ! ” she said,— “ My James ! ” she said,—
“ Alas for the woeful thing,
That a poet true and a friend of man,
In desperate days of bale and ban,
Should needs be born a King ! ”

THE HOUSE OF LIFE:

A SONNET SEQUENCE.

A Sonnet is a moment's monument,—
Memorial from the Soul's eternity
To one dead deathless hour. Look that it be,
Whether for lustral rite or dire portent,
Of its own arduous fullness reverent :
Carve it in ivory or in ebony,
As Day or Night may rule ; and let Time see
Its flowering crest impearled and orient.

A Sonnet is a coin : its face reveals
The soul,— its converse, to what Power 'tis due :—
Whether for tribute to the august appeals
Of Life, or dower in Love's high retinue,
It serve : or, 'mid the dark wharf's cavernous breath,
In Charon's palm it pay the toll to Death.

PART I.

YOUTH AND CHANGE.

SONNET I.

LOVE ENTHRONED.

I MARKED all kindred Powers the heart finds fair :—
Truth, with awed lips ; and Hope, with eyes upcast ;
And Fame, whose loud wings fan the ashen Past
To signal fires, Oblivion's flight to scare ;
And Youth, with still some single golden hair
Unto his shoulder clinging, since the last
Embrace wherein two sweet arms held him fast ;
And Life, still wreathing flowers for Death to wear.

Love's throne was not with these ; but far above
All passionate wind of welcome and farewell
He sat in breathless bowers they dream not of ;
Though Truth foreknow Love's heart, and Hope
foretell,
And Fame be for Love's sake desirable,
And Youth be dear, and Life be sweet to Love.

SONNET II.

BRIDAL BIRTH.

As when desire, long darkling, dawns, and first
The mother looks upon the newborn child,
Even so my Lady stood at gaze and smiled
When her soul knew at length the Love it nurs'd.
Born with her Life, creature of poignant thirst
And exquisite hunger, at her heart Love lay
Quickening in darkness, till a voice that day
Cried on him, and the bonds of birth were burst.

Now, shadowed by his wings, our faces yearn
Together, as his fullgrown feet now range
The grove, and his warm hands our couch pre-
pare :

Till to his song our bodiless souls in turn
Be born his children, when Death's nuptial change
Leaves us for light the halo of his hair.

SONNET III.

LOVE'S TESTAMENT.

O THOU who at Love's hour ecstasically
 Unto my heart dost ever more present,
 Clothed with the fire, thy heart his testament ;
 Whom I have neared and felt thy breath to be
 The inmost incense of his sanctuary ;
 Who without speech hast owned him, and, intent
 Upon his will, thy life with mine hast blent,
 And murmured, " I am thine, thou'rt one with me! "

O what from thee the grace, to me the prize,
 And what to Love the glory,—when the whole
 Of the deep stair thou tread'st to the dim shoal
 And weary water of the place of sighs,
 And there dost work deliverance, as thine eyes
 Draw up my prisoned spirit to thy soul !

SONNET IV.

LOVESIGHT.

WHEN do I see thee most, beloved one ?
 When in the light the spirits of mine eyes
 Before thy face, their altar, solemnize
 The worship of that Love through thee made known?
 Or when in the dusk hours, (we two alone,)
 Close-kissed and eloquent of still replies
 The twilight-hidden glimmering visage lies,
 And my soul only sees thy soul its own ?

O love, my love ! if I no more should see
 Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,
 Nor image of thine eyes in any spring,—
 How then should sound up Life's darkening slope
 The ground-whirl of the perished leaves of Hope,
 The wind of Death's imperishable wing ?

SONNET V.

HEART'S HOPE.

By what word's power, the key of paths untrod,
 Shall I the difficult deeps of Love explore,
 Till parted waves of Song yield up the shore
 Even as that sea which Israel crossed dryshod?
 For lo! in some poor rhythmic period,
 Lady, I fain would tell how evermore
 Thy soul I know not from thy body, nor
 Thee from myself, neither our love from God.

Yea, in God's name, and Love's and thine, would I
 Draw from one loving heart such evidence
 As to all hearts all things shall signify;
 Tender as dawn's first hill-fire, and intense
 As instantaneous penetrating sense,
 In Spring's birth-hour, of other Springs gone by.

SONNET VI.

THE KISS.

WHAT smoldering senses in death's sick delay
 Or seizure of malign vicissitude
 Can rob this body of honor, denude
 This soul of wedding-raiment worn to-day?
 For lo! even now my lady's lips did play
 With these my lips such consonant interlude
 As laureled Orpheus longed for when he wooed
 The half-drawn hungering face with that last lay.

I was a child beneath her touch,—a man
 When breast to breast we clung, even I and she,—
 A spirit when her spirit looked through me,—
 A god when all our life-breath met to fan
 Our life-blood, till love's emulous ardors ran,
 Fire within fire, desire in deity.

SONNET VII.

SUPREME SURRENDER.

To all the spirits of Love that wander by
Along his love-sown harvest-field of sleep
My lady lies apparent ; and the deep
Calls to the deep ; and no man sees but I.
The bliss so long afar, at length so nigh,
Rests their attained. Methinks proud Love must
weep
When Fate's control doth from his harvest reap
The sacred hour for which the years did sigh.

First touched, the hand now warm around my neck
Taught memory long to mock desire : and lo !
Across my breast the abandoned hair doth flow,
Where one shorn tress long stirred the longing ache :
And next the heart that trembled for its sake
Lies the queen-heart in sovereign overthrow.

SONNET VIII.

LOVE'S LOVERS.

SOME ladies love the jewels in Love's zone
And gold-tipped darts he hath for painless play
In idle scornful hours he flings away ;
And some that listen to his lute's soft tone
Do love to vaunt the silver praise their own ;
Some prize his blindfold sight ; and there be they
Who kissed his wings which brought him yesterday
And thank his wings to-day that he is flown.

My lady only loves the heart of Love :
 Therefore Love's heart, my lady, hath for thee
 His bower of unimagined flower and tree :
 There kneels he now, and all-anhungered of
 Thine eyes gray-lit in shadowing hair above,
 Seals with thy mouth his immortality.

SONNET IX.

PASSION AND WORSHIP.

ONE flame-winged brought a white-winged harp-player
 Even where my lady and I lay all alone ;
 Saying : " Behold, this minstrel is unknown ;
 Bid him depart, for I am minstrel here :
 Only my strains are to Love's dear ones dear."
 Then said I : " Through thine hautboy's rapturous
 tone
 Unto my lady still this harp makes moan,
 And still she deems the cadence deep and clear."
 Then said my lady : " Thou art Passion of Love,
 And this Love's Worship : both he plights to me.
 Thy mastering music walks the sunlit sea :
 But where wan water trembles in the grove
 And the wan moon is all the light thereof,
 This harp still makes my name its voluntary."

SONNET X.

THE PORTRAIT.

O LORD of all compassionate control,
 O Love ! let this my lady's picture glow
 Under my hand to praise her name, and show
 Even of her inner self the perfect whole :

That he who seeks her beauty's furthest goal,
 Beyond the light that the sweet glances throw
 And refluent wave of the sweet smile, may know
 The very sky and sea-line of her soul.

Lo ! it is done. Above the enthroning throat
 The mouth's mold testifies of voice and kiss,
 The shadowed eyes remember and foresee.
 Her face is made her shrine. Let all men note
 That in all years (O Love, thy gift is this !)
 They that would look on her must come to me.

SONNET XI.

THE LOVE-LETTER.

WARMED by her hand and shadowed by her hair
 As close she leaned and poured her heart through
 thee,
 Whereof the articulate throbs accompany
 The smooth black stream that makes thy whiteness
 fair,—
 Sweet fluttering sheet, even of her breath aware,—
 Oh let thy silent song disclose to me
 That soul wherewith her lips and eyes agree
 Like married music in Love's answering air.

Fain had I watched her when, at some fond thought,
 Her bosom to the writing closelier press'd,
 And her breast's secrets peered into her breast ;
 When, through eyes raised an instant, her soul sought
 My soul, and from the sudden confluence caught
 The words that made her love the loveliest.

SONNET XII.

THE LOVERS' WALK.

SWEET twining hedges flowers wind-stirred in no wise
 On this June day ; and hand that clings in hand : —
 Still glades ; and meeting faces scarcely fann'd : —
 An osier-odored stream that draws the skies
 Deep to its heart ; and mirrored eyes in eyes : —
 Fresh hourly wonder o'er the Summer land
 Of light and cloud ; and two souls softly spann'd
 With one o'erarching heaven of smiles and sighs : —

Even such their path, whose bodies lean unto
 Each other's visible sweetness amorously, —
 Whose passionate hearts lean by Love's high decree
 Together on his heart for ever true,
 As the cloud-foaming firmamental blue
 Rests on the blue line of a foamless sea.

SONNET XIII.

YOUTH'S ANTIPHONY.

"I LOVE you, sweet : how can you ever learn
 How much I love you ?" "You I love even so,
 And so I learn it." "Sweet, you cannot know
 How fair you are." "If fair enough to earn
 Your love, so much is all my love's concern."
 "My love grows hourly, sweet." "Mine too doth
 grow,
 Yet love seemed full so many hours ago !"
 Thus lovers speak till kisses claim their turn.

Ah! happy they to whom such words as these
 In youth have served for speech the whole day long,
 Hour after hour, remote from the world's throng,
 Work, contest, fame, all life's confederate pleas,—
 What while Love breathed in sighs and silences
 Through two blent souls one rapturous undersong.

SONNET XIV.

YOUTH'S SPRING-TRIBUTE.

ON this sweet bank your head thrice sweet and dear
 I lay, and spread your hair on either side,
 And see the newborn woodflowers bashful-eyed
 Look through the golden tresses here and there.
 On these debatable borders of the year
 Spring's foot half falters; scarce she yet may know
 The leafless blackthorn-blossom from the snow;
 And through her bowers the wind's way still is clear.
 But April's sun strikes down the glades to-day;
 So shut your eyes upturned, and feel my kiss
 Creep, as the Spring now thrills through every spray,
 Up your warm throat to your warm lips: for *this*
 Is even the hour of Love's sworn suit-service,
 With whom cold hearts are counted castaway.

SONNET XV

THE BIRTH-BOND.

HAVE you not noted, in some family
 Where two were born of a first marriage-bed,
 How still they own their gracious bond, though
 fed
 And nursed on the forgotten breast and knee? —
 17

How to their father's children they shall be
In act and thought of one goodwill ; but each
Shall for the other have, in silence speech,
And in a word complete community ?

Even so, when first I saw you, seemed it, love,
That among souls allied to mine was yet
One nearer kindred than life hinted of.
O born with me somewhere that men forget,
And though in years of sight and sound unmet,
Known for my soul's birth-partner well enough !

SONNET XVI.

A DAY OF LOVE.

THOSE envied places which do know her well,
And are so scornful of this lonely place,
Even now for once are emptied of her grace :
Nowhere but here she is : and while Love's spell
From his predominant presence doth compel
All alien hours, an outworn populace,
The hours of Love fill full the echoing space
With sweet confederate music favorable.

Now many memories make solicitous
The delicate love-lines of her mouth, till, lit
With quivering fire, the words take wing from it ;
As here between our kisses we sit thus
Speaking of things remembered, and so sit
Speechless while things forgotten call to us.

SONNET XVII.

BEAUTY'S PAGEANT.

WHAT dawn-pulse at the heart of heaven, or last
Incarnate flower of culminating day,—
What marshaled marvels on the skirts of May,
Or song full-quired, sweet June's encomiast ;
What glory of chance by nature's hand amass'd
Can vie with all those moods of varying grace
Which o'er one loveliest woman's form and face
Within this hour, within this room, have pass'd ?

Love's very vesture and elect disguise
Was each fine movement,—wonder new-begot
Of lily or swan or swan-stemmed galiot ;
Joy to his sight who now the sadlier sighs,
Parted again ; and sorrow yet for eyes
Unborn, that read these words and saw her not.

SONNET XVIII.

GENIUS IN BEAUTY.

BEAUTY like hers is genius. Not the call
Of Homer's or of Dante's heart sublime,—
Not Michael's hand furrowing the zones of time,—
Is more with compassed mysteries musical ;
Nay, not in Spring's or Summer's sweet footfall
More gathered gifts exuberant Life bequeathes
Than doth this sovereign face, whose love-spell
breathes
Even from its shadowed contour on the wall.

As many men are poets in their youth,
But for one sweet-strung soul the wires prolong
Even through all change the indomitable song ;
So in likewise the envenomed years, whose tooth
Rends shallower grace with ruin void of ruth,
Upon this beauty's power shall wreak no wrong.

SONNET XIX.

SILENT NOON.

YOUR hands lie open in the long fresh grass,--
The finger-points look through like rosy blooms :
Your eyes smile peace. The pasture gleams and
glooms
'Neath billowing skies that scatter and amass.
All round our nest, far as the eye can pass,
Are golden kingcup-fields with silver edge
Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorn-hedge.
'Tis visible silence, still as the hour-glass.

Deep in the sun-searched growths the dragon-fly
Hangs like a blue thread loosened from the sky :—
So this wing'd hour is dropt to us from above.
Oh ! clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower,
This close-companioned inarticulate hour
When twofold silence was the song of love.

SONNET XX.

GRACIOUS MOONLIGHT.

EVEN as the moon grows queenlier in mid-space
 When the sky darkens, and her cloud-rapt car
 Thrills with intenser radiance from afar,—
 So lambent, lady, beams thy sovereign grace
 When the drear soul desires thee. Of that face
 What shall be said,— which, like a governing star,
 Gathers and garners from all things that are
 Their silent penetrative loveliness?

O'er water daisies and wild waifs of Spring,
 There where the iris rears its gold-crowned sheaf
 With flowering rush and scept'red arrow-leaf,
 So have I marked Queen Dian, in bright ring
 Of cloud above and wave below, take wing
 And chase night's gloom, as thou the spirit's grief.

SONNET XXI.

LOVE-SWEETNESS.

SWEET dimness of her loosened hair's downfall
 About thy face ; her sweet hands round thy head
 In gracious fostering union garlanded ;
 Her tremulous smiles ; her glances' sweet recall
 Of love ; her murmuring sighs memorial ;
 Her mouth's culled sweetness by thy kisses shed
 On cheeks and neck and eyelids, and so led
 Back to her mouth which answers there for all : —
 What sweeter than these things, except the thing
 In lacking which all these would lose their sweet : —
 The confident heart's still fervor : the swift beat
 And soft subsidence of the spirit's wing,
 Then when it feels, in cloud-girt wayfaring,
 The breath of kindred plumes against its feet ?

SONNET XXII.

HEART'S HAVEN.

SOMETIMES she is a child within mine arms,
Cowering beneath dark wings that love must
chase,—

With still tears showering and averted face,
Inexplicably filled with faint alarms :
And oft from mine own spirit's hurtling harms
I crave the refuge of her deep embrace,—
Against all ills the fortified strong place
And sweet reserve of sovereign counter-charms.

And Love, our light at night and shade at noon,
Lulls us to rest with songs, and turns away
All shafts of shelterless tumultuous day.
Like the moon's growth, his face gleams through his
tune ;
And as soft waters warble to the moon,
Our answering spirits chime one roundelay.

SONNET XXIII.

LOVE'S BAUBLES.

I stood where Love in brimming armfuls bore
Slight wanton flowers and foolish toys of fruit :
And round him ladies thronged in warm pursuit,
Fingered and lipped and proffered the strange store
And from one hand the petal and the core
Savored of sleep ; and cluster and curled shoot
Seemed from another hand like shame's salute,—
Gifts that I felt my cheek was blushing for.

At last Love bade my Lady give the same :
And as I looked, the dew was light thereon ;
And as I took them, at her touch they shone
With inmost heaven-hue of the heart of flame.
And then Love said : " Lo ! when the hand is hers,
Follies of love are love's true ministers."

SONNET XXIV.

PRIDE OF YOUTH.

EVEN as a child, of sorrow that we give
The dead, but little in his heart can find,
Since without need of thought to his clear mind
Their turn it is to die and his to live : —
Even so the winged New Love smiles to receive
Along his eddyng plumes the auroral wind,
Nor, forward glorying, casts one look behind
Where night-rack shrouds the Old Love fugitive.

There is a change in every hour's recall,
And the last cowslip in the fields we see
On the same day with the first corn-poppy.
Alas for hourly change ! Alas for all
The loves that from his hand proud Youth lets fall,
Even as the beads of a told rosary !

SONNET XXV.

WINGED HOURS.

EACH hour until we meet is as a bird
 That wings from far his gradual way along
 The rustling covert of my soul,— his song
 Still loudlier trilled through leaves more deeply stirr'd :
 But at the hour of meeting, a clear word
 Is every note he sings, in Love's own tongue ;
 Yet, Love, thou know'st the sweet strain suffers
 wrong,
 Full oft through our contending joys unheard.

What of that hour at last, when for her sake
 No wing may fly to me nor song may flow ;
 When, wandering round my life unleaved, I know
 The bloodied feathers scattered in the brake,
 And think how she, far from me, with like eyes
 Sees through the untuneful bough the wingless skies ?

SONNET XXVI.

MID-RAPTURE.

THOU lovely and beloved, thou my love ;
 Whose kiss seems still the first ; whose summoning
 eyes,
 Even now, as for our love-world's new sunrise,
 Shed very dawn ; whose voice, attuned above
 All modulation of the deep-bowered dove,
 Is like a hand laid softly on the soul ;
 Whose hand is like a sweet voice to control
 Those worn tired brows it hath the keeping of : —

What word can answer to thy word,— what gaze
 To thine, which now absorbs within its sphere
 My worshiping face, till I am mirrored there
 Light-circled in a heaven of deep-drawn rays?
 What clasp, what kiss mine inmost heart can prove,
 O lovely and beloved, O my love?

SONNET XXVII.

HEART'S COMPASS.

SOMETIMES thou seem'st not as thyself alone,
 But as the meaning of all things that are ;
 A breathless wonder, shadowing forth afar
 Some heavenly solstice hushed and halcyon ;
 Whose unstirred lips are music's visible tone ;
 Whose eyes the sun-gate of the soul unbar,
 Being of its furthest fires oracular ; —
 The evident heart of all life sown and mown.

Even such Love is ; and is not thy name Love ?
 Yea, by thy hand the Love-god rends apart
 All gathering clouds of Night's ambiguous art ;
 Flings them far down, and sets thine eyes above ;
 And simply, as some gage of flower or glove,
 Stakes with a smile the world against thy heart.

SONNET XXVIII.

SOUL-LIGHT.

WHAT other woman could be loved like you,
 Or how of you should love possess his fill ?
 After the fullness of all rapture, still,—

As at the end of some deep avenue
 A tender glamour of day,—there comes to view
 Far in your eyes a yet more hungering thrill,—
 Such fire as Love's soul-winnowing hands distill
 Even from his inmost ark of light and dew.

And as the traveler triumphs with the sun,
 Glorying in heat's mid-height, yet startide brings
 Wonder new-born, and still fresh transport springs
 From limpid lambent hours of day begun ; —
 Even so, through eyes and voice, your soul doth
 move
 My soul with changeful light of infinite love.

SONNET XXIX.

THE MOONSTAR.

LADY, I thank thee for thy loveliness,
 Because my lady is more lovely still.
 Glorying I gaze, and yield with glad goodwill
 To thee thy tribute ; by whose sweet-spun dress
 Of delicate life Love labors to assess
 My lady's absolute queendom ; saying, " Lo !
 How high this beauty is, which yet doth show
 But as that beauty's sovereign votaress."

LADY, I saw thee with her, side by side ;
 And as, when night's fair fires their queen surround,
 An emulous star too near the moon will ride,—
 Even so thy rays within her luminous bound
 Were traced no more ; and by the light so drown'd,
 Lady, not thou but she was glorified.

SONNET XXX.

LAST FIRE.

Love, through your spirit and mine what summer eve
Now glows with glory of all things possess'd,
Since this day's sun of rapture filled the west
And the light sweetened as the fire took leave?
Awhile now softlier let your bosom heave,
As in Love's harbor, even that loving breast,
All care takes refuge while we sink to rest,
And mutual dreams the bygone bliss retrieve.

Many the days that Winter keeps in store,
Sunless throughout, or whose brief sun-glimpses
Scarce shed the heaped snow through the naked trees.
This day at least was Summer's paramour,
Sun-colored to the imperishable core
With sweet well-being of love and full heart's ease.

SONNET XXXI.

HER GIFTS.

High grace, the dower of queens ; and therewithal
Some wood-born wonder's sweet simplicity ;
A glance like water brimming with the sky
Or hyacinth-light where forest-shadows fall ;
Such thrilling pallor of cheek as doth enthrall
The heart ; a mouth whose passionate forms imply
All music and all silence held thereby ;
Deep golden locks, her sovereign coronal ;
A round reared neck, meet column of Love's shrine
To cling to when the heart takes sanctuary ;
Hands which for ever at Love's bidding be,
And soft-stirred feet still answering to his sign : —
These are her gifts, as tongue may tell them o'er.
Breathe low her name, my soul ; for that means
more.

SONNET XXXII.

EQUAL TROTH.

Not by one measure mayst thou mete our love ;
 For how should I be loved as I loved thee ? —
 I, graceless, joyless, lacking absolutely
 All gifts that with thy queenship best behooove ; —
 Thou, throned in every heart's elect alcove,
 And crowned with garlands culled from every tree,
 Which for no head but thine, by Love's decree,
 All beauties and all mysteries interwove.

But here thine eyes and lips yield soft rebuke : —
 "Then only," (say'st thou) "could I love thee less,
 When thou couldst doubt my love's equality."
 Peace, sweet ! If not to sum but worth we look,—
 Thy heart's transcendence, not my heart's excess,—
 Then more a thousandfold thou lov'st than I.

SONNET XXXIII.

VENUS VICTRIX.

COULD Juno's self more sovereign presence wear
 Than thou, 'mid other ladies throned in grace ? —
 Or Pallas, when thou bend'st with soul-stilled face
 O'er poet's page gold-shadowed in thy hair ?
 Dost thou than Venus seem less heavenly fair
 When o'er the sea of love's tumultuous trance
 Hovers thy smile, and mingles with thy glance
 That sweet voice like the last wave murmuring there ?
 Before such triune loveliness divine
 Awestruck I ask, which goddess here most claims
 The prize that, howsoe'er adjudged, is thine ?
 Then Love breathes low the sweetest of thy names:
 And Venus Victrix to my heart doth bring
 Herself, the Helen of her guerdoning.

SONNET XXXIV.

THE DARK GLASS.

Not I myself know all my love for thee :

How should I reach so far, who cannot weigh

To-morrow's dower by gage of yesterday ?

Shall birth and death, and all dark names that be

As doors and windows bared to some loud sea,

Lash deaf mine ears and blind my face with spray ;

And shall my sense pierce love,—the last relay

And ultimate outpost of eternity ?

Lo ! what am I to Love, the lord of all ?

One murmuring shell he gathers from the sand,—

One little heart-flame sheltered in his hand.

Yet through thine eyes he grants me clearest call

And veriest touch of powers primordial

That any hour-girt life may understand.

SONNET XXXV.

THE LAMP'S SHRINE.

SOMETIMES I fain would find in thee some fault,

That I might love thee still in spite of it,

Yet how should our Lord Love curtail one whit

Thy perfect praise whom most he would exalt ?

Alas ! he can but make my heart's low vault

Even in men's sight unworthier, being lit

By thee, who thereby show'st more exquisite

Like fiery chrysoprase in deep basalt.

Yet will I nowise shrink ; but at Love's shrine

Myself within the beams his brow doth dart

Will set the flashing jewel of thy heart

In that dull chamber where it deigns to shine :

For lo ! in honor of thine excellencies

My heart takes pride to show how **poor it is**

SONNET XXXVI.

LIFE-IN-LOVE.

Not in thy body is thy life at all
 But in this lady's lips and hands and eyes ;
 Through these she yields thee life that vivifies
 What else were sorrow's servant and death's thrall
 Look on thyself without her, and recall
 The waste remembrance and forlorn surmise
 That lived but in a dead-drawn breath of sighs
 O'er vanished hours and hours eventual.

Even so much life hath the poor tress of hair
 Which, stored apart, is all love hath to show
 For heart-beats and for fire-heats long ago ;
 Even so much life endures unknown, even where,
 'Mid change the changeless night environeth,
 Lies all that golden hair undimmed in death.

SONNET XXXVII.

THE LOVE-MOON.

" WHEN that dead face, bowered in the furthest years,
 Which once was all the life years held for thee,
 Can now scarce bid the tides of memory
 Cast on thy soul a little spray of tears,—
 How canst thou gaze into those eyes of hers
 Whom now thy heart delights in, and not see
 Within each orb Love's philtred euphrasy
 Make them of buried troth remembrancers ? "

" Nay, pitiful Love, nay, loving Pity ! Well
 Thou knowest that in these twain I have confess'd
 Two very voices of thy summoning bell.
 Nay, Master, shall not Death make manifest
 In these the culminant changes which approve
 The love-moon that must light my soul to Love ? "

SONNET XXXVIII.

THE MORROW'S MESSAGE.

"THOU Ghost," I said, "and is thy name To-day? --
 Yesterday's son, with such an abject brow! —
 And can To-morrow be more pale than thou?"
 While yet I spoke, the silence answered: "Yea,
 Henceforth our issue is all grieved and gray,
 And each beforehand makes such poor avow
 As of old leaves beneath the budding bough.
 Or night-drift that the sundawn shreds away."

Then cried I: "Mother of many malisons,
 O Earth, receive me to thy dusty bed!"
 But therewithal the tremulous silence said:
 "Lo! Love yet bids thy lady greet thee once: —
 Yea, twice,—whereby thy life is still the sun's;
 And thrice,—whereby the shadow of death is dead."

SONNET XXXIX.

SLEEPLESS DREAMS.

GIRT in dark growths, yet glimmering with one star,
 O night desirous as the nights of youth!
 Why should my heart within thy spell, forsooth,
 Now beat, as the bride's finger-pulses are
 Quickened within the girdling golden bar?
 What wings are these that fan my pillow smooth?
 And why does Sleep, waked back by Joy and Ruth,
 Tread softly round and gaze at me from far?
 Nay, night deep-leaved! And would Love feign in
 thee
 Some shadowy palpitating grove that bears
 Rest for man's eyes and music for his ears?
 O lonely night! are thou not known to me,
 A thicket hung with masks of mockery
 And watered with the wasteful warmth of tears?

SONNET XL.

SEVERED SELVES.

Two separate divided silences,
Which, brought together, would find loving voice ;
Two glances which together would rejoice
In love, now lost like stars beyond dark trees ;
Two hands apart whose touch alone gives ease ;
Two bosoms which, heart-shrined with mutual flame,
Would, meeting in one clasp, be made the same ;
Two souls, the shores wave-mocked of sundering
seas : —

Such are we now. Ah ! may our hope forecast
Indeed one hour again, when on this stream
Of darkened love once more the light shall
gleam ? —
An hour how slow to come, how quickly past, —
Which blooms and fades, and only leaves at last,
Faint as shed flowers, the attenuated dream.

SONNET XLI.

THROUGH DEATH TO LOVE.

LIKE labor-laden moonclouds faint to flee
From winds that sweep the winter-bitten wold, —
Like multiform circumfluence manifold
Of night's flood-tide, — like terrors that agree
Of hoarse-tongued fire and inarticulate sea, —
Even such, within some glass dimmed by our breath,
Our hearts discern wild images of Death,
Shadows and shoals that edge eternity.

Howbeit athwart Death's imminent shade doth soar
 One Power, than flow of stream or flight of dove
 Sweeter to glide around, to brood above.
 Tell me, my heart,— what angel-greeted door
 Or threshold of wing-winnowed threshing-floor
 Hath guest fire-fledged as thine, whose lord is Love ?

SONNET XLII.

HOPE OVERTAKEN.

I DEEMED thy garments, O my Hope, were gray,
 So far I viewed thee. Now the space between
 Is passed at length ; and garmented in green
 Even as in days of yore thou stand'st to-day.
 Ah God ! and but for lingering dull dismay,
 On all that road our footsteps erst had been
 Even thus commingled, and our shadows seen
 Blent on the hedgerows and the water-way.
 O Hope of mine whose eyes are living love,
 No eyes but hers,— O Love and Hope the same !—
 Lean close to me, for now the sinking sun
 That warmed our feet scarce gilds our hair above.
 O hers thy voice and very hers thy name !
 Alas, cling round me, for the day is done !

SONNET XLIII.

LOVE AND HOPE.

BLESS love and hope. Full many a withered year
 Whirled past us, eddying to its chill doomsday ;
 And clasped together where the blown leaves lay,
 We long have knelt and wept full many a tear.
 Yet lo ! one hour at last, the Spring's compeer,
 Flutes softly to us from some green byway :
 Those years, those tears are dead, but only they :—
 Bless love and hope, true soul ; for we are here.

Cling heart to heart ; nor of this hour demand
Whether in very truth, when we are dead,
Our hearts shall wake to know Love's golden head
Sole sunshine of the imperishable land ;
Or but discern, through night's unfeatured scope,
Scorn-fired at length the illusive eyes of Hope.

SONNET XLIV.

CLOUD AND WIND.

Love, should I fear death most for you or me?
Yet if you die, can I not follow you,
Forcing the straits of change? Alas ! but who
Shall wrest a bond from night's inveteracy,
Ere yet my hazardous soul put forth, to be
Her warrant against all her haste might rue? —
Ah ! in your eyes so reached what dumb adieu,
What unsunned gyres of waste eternity?
And if I die the first, shall death be then
A lampless watchtower whence I see you weep? —
Or (woe is me !) a bed wherein my sleep
Ne'er notes (as death's dear cup at last you drain),
The hour when you too learn that all is vain
And that Hope sows what Love shall never reap?

SONNET XLV.

SECRET PARTING.

BECAUSE our talk was of the cloud-control
And moon-track of the journeying face of Fate,
Her tremulous kisses faltered at love's gate
And her eyes dreamed against a distant goal •
But soon, remembering her how brief the whole
Of joy, which its own hours annihilate,
Her set gaze gathered, thirstier than of late,
And as she kissed, her mouth became her soul.

Thence in what ways we wandered, and how strove
 To build with fire-tried vows the piteous home
 Which memory haunts and whither sleep may
 roam,—

They only know for whom the roof of Love
 Is the still-seated secret of the grove,
 Nor spire may rise nor bell be heard therefrom.

SONNET XLVI.

PARTED LOVE.

WHAT shall be said of this embattled day
 And armed occupation of this night
 By all thy foes beleaguered,— now when sight
 Nor sound denotes the loved one far away?
 Of these thy vanquished hours what shalt thou say,—
 As every sense to which she dealt delight
 Now labors lonely o'er the stark noon-height
 To reach the sunset's desolate disarray?

Stand still, fond fettered wretch ! while Memory's art
 Parades the Past before thy face, and lures
 Thy spirit to her passionate portraitures :
 Till the tempestuous tide-gates flung apart
 Flood with wild will the hollows of thy heart,
 And thy heart rends thee, and thy body endures.

SONNET XLVII.

BROKEN MUSIC.

THE mother will not turn, who thinks she hears
 Her nursling's speech first grow articulate ;
 But breathless with averted eyes elate

She sits, with open lips and open ears,
 That it may call her twice. 'Mid doubts and fears
 Thus oft my soul has hearkened ; till the song,
 A central moan for days, at length found tongue,
 And the sweet music welled and the sweet tears.

But now, whatever while the soul is fain
 To list that wonted murmur, as it were
 The speech-bound sea-shell's low importunate strain,—
 No breath of song, thy voice alone is there,
 O bitterly beloved ! and all her gain
 Is but the pang of unpermitted prayer.



SONNET XLVIII.

DEATH-IN-LOVE.

THERE came an image in Life's retinue
 That had Love's wings and bore his gonimion :
 Fair was the web, and nobly wrought thereon,
 O soul-sequestered face, thy form and hue !
 Bewildering sounds, such as Spring wakens to,
 Shook in its folds ; and through my heart its power
 Sped trackless as the immemorable hour
 When birth's dark portal groaned and all was new.

But a veiled woman followed, and she caught
 The banner round its staff, to furl and cling,—
 Then plucked a feather from the bearer's wing,
 And held it to his lips that stirred it not,
 And said to me, " Behold, there is no breath :
 I and this Love are one, and I am Death."

SONNETS XLIX., L., LI., LII.

WILLOWWOOD.

I.

I SAT with Love upon a woodside well,
Leaning across the water, I and he ;
Nor ever did he speak nor looked at me,
But touched his lute wherein was audible
The certain secret thing he had to tell :
Only our mirrored eyes met silently
In the low wave ; and that sound came to be
The passionate voice I knew ; and my tears fell.

And at their fall, his eyes beneath grew hers ;
And with his foot and with his wing-feathers
He swept the spring that watered my heart's drouth
Then the dark ripples spread to waving hair,
And as I stooped, her own lips rising there
Bubbled with brimming kisses at my mouth.

II.

AND now Love sang : but his was such a song,
So meshed with half-remembrance hard to free,
As souls disused in death's sterility
May sing when the new birthday tarries long.
And I was made aware of a dumb throng
That stood aloof, one form by every tree,
All mournful forms, for each was I or she,
The shades of those our days that had no tongue.

They looked on us, and knew us and were known ;
While fast together, alive from the abyss,
Clung the soul-wrung implacable close kiss ;
And pity of self through all made broken moan
Which said, " For once, for once, for once alone ! "
And still Love sang, and what he sang was this :—

III.

“O YE, all ye that walk in Willowwood,
That walk with hollow faces burning white ;
What fathom-depth of soul-struck widowhood,
What long, what longer hours, one lifelong night,
Ere ye again, who so in vain have wooed
Your last hope lost, who so in vain invite
Your lips to that their unforgotten food,
Ere ye, ere ye again shall see the light !

Alas ! the bitter banks in Willowwood,
With tear-spurge wan, with blood-wort burning red ;
Alas ! if ever such a pillow could
Steep deep the soul in sleep till she were dead,—
Better all life forget her than this thing,
That Willowwood should hold her wandering !”

IV.

So sang he : and as meeting rose and rose
Together cling through the wind's wellaway
Nor change at once, yet near the end of day
The leaves drop loosened where the heart-stain
glows,—
So when the song died did the kiss uncloze ;
And her face fell back drowned, and was as gray
As its gray eyes ; and if it ever may
Meet mine again I know not if Love knows.

Only I know that I leaned low and drank
A long draught from the water where she sank,
Her breath and all her tears and all her soul :
And as I leaned, I know I felt Love's face
Pressed on my neck with moan of pity and grace,
Till both our heads were in his aureole.

SONNET LIIL.

WITHOUT HER.

WHAT of her glass without her ? The blank gray
 There where the pool is blind of the moon's face.
 Her dress without her ? The tossed empty space
 Of cloud-rack whence the moon has passed away.
 Her paths without her ? Day's appointed sway
 Usurped by desolate night. Her pillowed place
 Without her ? Tears, ah me ! for love's good grace
 And cold forgetfulness of night or day.

What of the heart without her ? Nay, poor heart,
 Of thee what word remains ere speech be still ?
 A wayfarer by barren ways and chill,
 Steep ways and weary, without her thou art,
 Where the long cloud, the long wood's counterpart,
 Sheds doubled darkness up the laboring hill.

SONNET LIV.

LOVE'S FATALITY.

SWEET LOVE,—but oh ! most dread Desire of Love
 Life-thwarted. Linked in gyves I saw them stand,
 Love shackled with Vain-longing, hand to hand :
 And one was eyed as the blue vault above :
 But hope tempestuous like a fire-cloud hove
 I' the other's gaze, even as in his whose wand
 Vainly all night with spell-wrought power has
 spann'd
 The unyielding caves of some deep treasure-trove.

Also his lips, two writhen flakes of flame,
 Made moan : “ Alas O Love, thus leashed with me !
 Wing-footed thou, wing-shouldered, once born free :
 And I, thy cowering self, in chains grown tame,—
 Bound to thy body and soul, named with thy name,—
 Life's iron heart, even Love's Fatality.”

SONNET LV.

STILLBORN LOVE.

THE hour which might have been yet might not be,
Which man's and woman's heart conceived and
bore

Yet whereof life was barren,— on what shore
Bides it the breaking of Time's weary sea?
Bondchild of all consummate joys set free,

It somewhere sighs and serves, and mute before
The house of Love, hears through the echoing door
His hours elect in choral consonancy.

But lo ! what wedded souls now hand in hand
Together tread at last the immortal strand
With eyes where burning memory lights love
home ?

Lo ! how the little outcast hour has turned
And leaped to them and in their faces yearned : —
“ I am your child : O parents, ye have come ! ”

SONNETS LVI., LVII., LVIII.

TRUE WOMAN.

I. HERSELF.

To be a sweetness more desired than Spring ;
A bodily beauty more acceptable
Than the wild rose-tree's arch that crowns the fell ;
To be an essence more environing
Than wine's drained juice ; a music ravishing
More than the passionate pulse of Philomel ; —
To be all this 'neath one soft bosom's swell
That is the flower of life : — how strange a thing !

How strange a thing to be what Man can know
 But as a sacred secret ! Heaven's own screen
 Hides her soul's purest depth and loveliest glow ;
 Closely withheld, as all things most unseen,—
 The wave-bowered pearl,— the heart-shaped seal
 of green
 That flecks the snowdrop underneath the snow.

II. HER LOVE.

SHE loves him ; for her infinite soul is Love,
 And he her loadstar. Passion in her is
 A glass facing his fire, where the bright bliss
 Is mirrored, and the heat returned. Yet move
 That glass, a stranger's amorous flame to prove,
 And it shall turn, by instant contraries,
 Ice to the moon ; while her pure fire to his
 For whom it burns, clings close i' the heart's al-
 cove.

Lo ! they are one. With wifely breast to breast
 And circling arms, she welcomes all command
 Of love,— her soul to answering ardors un'd :
 Yet as morn springs or twilight sinks to sleep,
 Ah ! who shall say she deems not loveliest
 The hour of sisterly sweet hand-in-hand !

III. HER HEAVEN.

IF to grow old in Heaven is to grow young,
 (As the Seer saw and said,) then blest were he
 With youth for evermore, whose heaven should be
 True Woman, she whom these weak notes have sung.
 Here and hereafter,— choir-strains of her tongue,—
 Sky-spaces of her eyes,— sweet signs that flee
 About her soul's immediate sanctuary,—
 Were paradise all uttermost worlds among.

The sunrise blooms and withers on the hill
 Like any hillflower ; and the noblest troth
 Dies here to dust. Yet shall Heaven's promise
 clothe
 Even yet those lovers who have cherished still
 This test for love : — in every kiss sealed fast
 To feel the first kiss and forbode the last.

SONNET LIX.

LOVE'S LAST GIFT.

Love to his singer held a glistening leaf,
 And said : "The rose-tree and the apple-tree
 Have fruits to vaunt or flowers to lure the bee ;
 And golden shafts are in the feathered sheaf
 Of the great harvest marshal, the year's chief,
 Victorious Summer ; ay, and 'neath warm sea
 Strange secret grasses lurk inviolably
 Between the filtering channels of sunk reef.

All are my blooms ; and all sweet blooms of love
 To thee I gave while Spring and Summer sang ;
 But Autumn stops to listen, with some pang
 From those worse things the wind is moaning of.
 Only this laurel dreads no winter days :
 Take my last gift ; thy heart hath sung my
 praise.

PART II.

CHANGE AND FATE.

SONNET LX.

TRANSFIGURED LIFE.

As growth of form or momentary glance
 In a child's features will recall to mind
 The father's with the mother's face combin'd,—
 Sweet interchange that memories still exchange :
 And yet, as childhood's years and youth's advance,
 The gradual moldings leave one stamp behind,
 Till in the blended likeness now we find
 A separate man's or woman's countenance : —

So in the Song, the singer's Joy and Pain,
 Its very parents, evermore expand
 To bid the passion's fullgrown birth remain.
 By Art's transfiguring essence subtly spann'd ;
 And from that song-cloud shaped as a man's hand
 There comes the sound as of abundant rain.

SONNET LXI.

THE SONG-THROE.

By thine own tears thy song must tears beget,
 O Singer ! Magic mirror thou hast none
 Except thy manifest heart ; and save thine own
 Anguish or ardor, else no amulet.
 Cisterned in Pride, verse is the feathery jet
 Of soulless air-flung fountains ; nay, more dry
 Than the Dead Sea for throats that thirst and sigh,
 That song o'er which no singer's lids grew wet.

The Song-god — He the Sun-god — is no slave
 Of thine : thy Hunter he, who for thy soul
 Fledges his shaft : to no august control
 Of thy skilled hand his quivered store he gave :
 But if thy lips' loud cry leap to his smart,
 The inspir'd recoil shall pierce thy brother's heart.

SONNET LXII.

THE SOUL'S SPHERE.

SOME prisoned moon in steep cloud-fastnesses,—
 Throned queen and thrall'd ; some dying sun whose
 pyre
 Blazed with momentous memorable fire ; —
 Who hath not yearned and fed his heart with these ?
 Who, sleepless, hath not anguished to appease
 Tragical shadow's realm of sound and sight
 Conjectured in the lamentable night ?
 Lo ! the soul's sphere of infinite images !

What sense shall count them ? Whether it forecast
 The rose-winged hours that flutter in the van
 Of Love's unquestioning unreveal'd span,—
 Visions of golden futures : or that last
 Wild pageant of the accumulated past
 That clangs and flashes for a drowning man.

SONNET LXIII.

INCLUSIVENESS.

THE changing guests, each in a different mood,
 Sit at the roadside table and arise :
 And every life among them in likewise

Is a soul's board set daily with new food.
 What man has bent o'er his son's sleep, to brood
 How that face shall watch his when cold it lies? —
 Or thought, as his own mother kissed his eyes,
 Of what her kiss was when his father wooed?

May not this ancient room thou sit'st in dwell
 In separate living souls for joy or pain?
 Nay, all its corners may be painted plain
 Where Heaven shows pictures of some life spent well;
 And may be stamped, a memory all in vain,
 Upon the sight of lidless eyes in Hell.

SONNET LXIV.

ARDOR AND MEMORY.

THE cuckoo-throb, the heartbeat of the Spring;
 The rosebud's blush that leaves it as it grows
 Into the full-eyed fair unblushing rose;
 The summer clouds that visit every wing
 With fires of sunrise and of sunseting;
 The furtive flickering streams to light re-born
 'Mid airs new-fledged and valorous lusts of morn,
 While all the daughters of the daybreak sing: —

These ardor loves, and memory: and when flown
 All joys, and through dark forest-boughs in flight
 The wind swoops onward brandishing the light,
 Even yet the rose-tree's verdure left alone
 Will flush all ruddy though the rose be gone;
 With ditties and with dirges infinite.

SONNET LXV.

KNOWN IN VAIN.

As two whose love, first foolish, widening scope,
 Knows suddenly, to music high and soft,
 The Holy of holies ; who because they scoff'd
 Are now amazed with shame, nor dare to cope
 With the whole truth aloud, lest heaven should ope ;
 Yet, at their meetings, laugh not as they laugh'd
 In speech ; nor speak, at length ; but sitting oft
 Together, within hopeless sight of hope
 For hours are silent : — So it happeneth
 When Work and Will awake too late, to gaze
 After their life sailed by, and hold their breath.
 Ah ! who shall dare to search through what sad
 maze
 Thenceforth their incommunicable ways
 Follow the desultory feet of Death ?

SONNET LXVI.

THE HEART OF THE NIGHT.

FROM child to youth ; from youth to arduous man ;
 From lethargy to fever of the heart ;
 From faithful life to dream-dowered days apart ;
 From trust to doubt ; from doubt to brink of ban ; --
 Thus much of change in one swift cycle ran
 Till now. Alas, the soul ! — how soon must she
 Accept her primal immortality, —
 The flesh resume its dust whence it began ?

O Lord of work and peace ! O Lord of life !
 O Lord, the awful Lord of will ! though late,
 Even yet renew this soul with duteous breath :
 That when the peace is garnered in from strife,
 The work retrieved, the will regenerate,
 This soul may see thy face, O Lord of death !

SONNET LXVII.

THE LANDMARK.

WAS *that* the landmark? What,—the foolish well
 Whose wave, low down, I did not stoop to drink,
 But sat and flung the pebbles from its brink
 In sport to send its imaged skies pell-mell,
 (And mine own image, had I noted well!) —
 Was that my point of turning? — I had thought
 The stations of my course should rise unsought,
 As altar-stone or ensigned citadel.

But lo! the path is missed, I must go back,
 And thirst to drink when next I reach the spring
 Which once I stained, which since may have grown
 black.
 Yet though no light be left nor bird now sing
 As here I turn, I'll thank God, hastening,
 That the same goal is still on the same track.

SONNET LXVIII.

A DARK DAY.

THE gloom that breathes upon me with these airs
 Is like the drops which strike the traveler's brow
 Who knows not, darkling, if they bring him now
 Fresh storm, or be old rain the covert bears.
 Ah! bodes this hour some harvest of new tares,
 Or hath but memory of the day whose plow
 Sowed hunger once,— the night at length when thou,
 O prayer found vain, didst fall from out my prayers?
 How prickly were the growths which yet how smooth,
 Along the hedgerows of this journey shed,
 Lie by Time's grace till night and sleep may soothe!
 Even as the thistledown from pathsides dead
 Gleaned by a girl in autumns of her youth,
 Which one new year makes soft her marriage-bed

SONNET LXIX.

AUTUMN IDLENESS.

THIS sunlight shames November where he grieves
 In dead red leaves, and will not let him shun
 The day, though bough with bough be over-run,
 But with a blessing every glade receives
 High salutation ; while from hillock-eaves
 The deer gaze calling, dappled white and dun,
 As if, being foresters of old, the sun
 Had marked them with the shade of forest-leaves.

Here dawn to-day unveiled her magic glass ;
 Here noon now gives the thirst and takes the dew
 Till eve bring rest when other good things pass.
 And here the lost hours the lost hours renew
 While I still lead my shadow o'er the grass,
 Nor know, for longing, that which I should do.

SONNET LXX.

THE HILL SUMMIT.

THIS feast-day of the sun, his altar there
 In the broad west has blazed for vesper-song
 And I have loitered in the vale too long
 And gaze now a belated worshiper.
 Yet may I not forget that I was 'ware,
 So journeying, of his face at intervals
 Transfigured where the fringed horizon falls,—
 A fiery bush with coruscating hair.

And now that I have climbed and won this height,
 I must tread downward through the sloping shade
 And travel the bewildered tracks till night.
 Yet for this hour I still may here be stayed
 And see the gold air and the silver fade
 And the last bird fly into the last light.

SONNETS LXXI., LXXII., LXXIII.

THE CHOICE.

I.

EAT thou and drink ; to-morrow thou shalt die.
 Surely the earth, that's wise being very old,
 Needs not our help. Then loose me, love, and hold
 Thy sultry hair up from my face ; that I
 May pour for thee this golden wine, brim-high,
 Till round the glass thy fingers glow like gold.
 We'll drown all hours : thy song, while hours are
 toll'd,
 Shall leap, as fountains veil the changing sky.
 Now kiss, and think that there are really those,
 My own high-bosomed beauty, who increase
 Vain gold, vain lore, and yet might choose our
 way !
 Through many years they toil ; then on a day
 They die not,—for their life was death,—but cease ;
 And round their narrow lips the mold falls close.

II.

WATCH thou and fear ; to-morrow thou shalt die.
 Or art thou sure thou shalt have time for death ?
 Is not the day which God's word promiseth
 To come man knows not when ? In yonder sky,
 Now while we speak, the sun speeds forth : can I
 Or thou assure him of his goal ? God's breath
 Even at this moment haply quickeneth
 The air to a flame ; till spirits, always nigh
 Though screened and hid, shall walk the daylight here.
 And dost thou prate of all that man shall do ?
 Canst thou, who hast but plagues, presume to be
 Glad in his gladness that comes after thee ?
 Will his strength slay thy worm in Hell ? Go to :
 Cover thy countenance, and watch, and fear.

III.

THINK thou and act ; to-morrow thou shalt die.

Outstretched in the sun's warmth upon the shore,
 Thou say'st : " Man's measured path is all gone o'er :
 Up all his years, steeply, with strain and sigh,
 Man clomb until he touched the truth ; and I,
 Even I, am he whom it was destined for."

How should this be ? Art thou then so much more
 Than they who sowed, that thou shouldst reap
 thereby ?

Nay, come up hither. From this wave-washed mound
 Unto the furthest flood-brim look with me ;
 Then reach on with thy thought till it be drown'd.
 Miles and miles distant though the last line be,
 And though thy soul sail leagues and leagues beyond,—
 Still, leagues beyond those leagues, there is more
 sea.

SONNETS LXXIV., LXXV., LXXVI.

OLD AND NEW ART.

I. ST. LUKE THE PAINTER.

GIVE honor unto Luke Evangelist ;
 For he it was (the aged legends say)
 Who first taught Art to fold her hands and pray.
 Scarcely at once she dared to rend the mist
 Of devious symbols : but soon having wist
 How sky-breadth and field-silence and this day
 Are symbols also in some deeper way,
 She looked through these to God and was God's priest
 And if, past noon, her toil began to irk,
 And she sought talismans, and turned in vain
 To soulless self-reflections of man's skill,—
 Yet now, in this the twilight, she might still
 Kneel in the latter grass to pray again,
 Ere the night cometh and she may not work.

II. NOT AS THESE.

"I am not as these are," the poet saith
 In youth's pride, and the painter, among men
 At bay, where never pencil comes nor pen,
 And shut about with his own frozen breath.
 To others, for whom only rhyme wins faith
 As poets,— only paint as painters,— then
 He turns in the cold silence ; and again
 Shrinking, "I am not as these are," he saith.

And say that this is so, what follows it ?
 For were thine eyes set backwards in thine head,
 Such words were well ; but they see on, and far.
 Unto the lights of the great past, new-lit
 Fair for the Future's track, look thou instead,—
 Say thou instead, "I am not as *these* are."

III. THE HUSBANDMEN.

THOUGH God, as one that is an householder,
 Called these to labor in his vineyard first,
 Before the husk of darkness was well burst
 Bidding them grope their way out and bestir,
 (Who, questioned of their wages, answered, "Sir,
 Unto each man a penny :") though the worst
 Burthen of heat was theirs and the dry thirst :
 Though God hath since found none such as these were
 To do their work like them : — Because of this
 Stand not ye idle in the market-place.
 Which of ye knoweth *he* is not that last
 Who may be first by faith and will ? — yea, his
 The hand which after the appointed days
 And hours shall give a Future to their Past ?

SONNET LXXVII.

SOUL'S BEAUTY.

UNDER the arch of Life, where love and death,
 Terror and mystery, guard her shrine, I saw
 Beauty enthroned ; and though her gaze struck awe,
 I drew it in as simply as my breath.
 Hers are the eyes which, over and beneath,
 The sky and sea bend on thee,— which can draw,
 By sea or sky or woman, to one law,
 The allotted bondman of her palm and wreath.

This is that Lady Beauty, in whose praise
 Thy voice and hand shake still,— long known to thee
 By flying hair and fluttering hem,— the beat
 Following her daily of thy heart and feet,
 How passionately and irretrievably,
 In what fond flight, how many ways and days !

SONNET LXXVIII.

BODY'S BEAUTY.

OF Adam's first wife, Lilith, it is told
 (The witch he loved before the gift of Eve,)
 That, ere the snake's, her sweet tongue could deceive,
 And her enchanted hair was the first gold.
 And still she sits, young while the earth is old,
 And, subtly of herself contemplative,
 Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave,
 Till heart and body and life are in its hold.

The rose and poppy are her flowers ; for where
 Is he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent
 And soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare ?
 Lo ! as that youth's eyes burned at thine, so went
 Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck
 bent
 And round his heart one strangling golden hair.

SONNET LXXIX.

THE MONOCHORD.

Is it this sky's vast vault or ocean's sound
That Life's self and draws my life from me,
And by instinct ineffable decree
Holds my breath quailing on the bitter bound ?
Nay, is it Life or Death, thus thunder-crown'd,
That 'mid the tide of all emergency
Now notes my separate wave, and to what sea
Its difficult eddies labor in the ground ?

Oh ! what is this that knows the road I came,
The flame turned cloud, returned to flame,
The listed shifted steeps and all the way ? —
That draws round me at last this wind-warm space,
And in regenerate rapture turns my face
Upon the devious coverts of dismay ?

SONNET LXXX.

FROM DAWN TO NOON.

As the child knows not if his mother's face
Be fair ; nor of his elders yet can deem
What each most is ; but as of hill or stream
At dawn, all glimmering life surrounds his place :
Who yet, tow'rd noon of his half-weary race,
Pausing awhile beneath the high sun-beam
And gazing steadily back,— as through a dream,
In things long past new features now can trace :—

Even so the thought that is at length fullgrown
Turns back to note the sun-smit paths, all gray
And marvelous once, where first it walked alone ;
And haply doubts, amid the unblenching day,
Which most or least impelled its onward way,—
Those unknown things or these things overknown.

SONNET LXXXI.

MEMORIAL THRESHOLDS.

WHAT place so strange,— though unrevealed snow
 With unimaginable fires arise
 At the earth's end,— what passion of surprise
 Like frost-bound fire-girt scenes of long ago?
 Lo ! this is none but I this hour ; and lo !
 This is the very place which to mine eyes
 Those mortal hours in vain immortalize,
 'Mid hurrying crowds, with what alone I know.

City, of thine a single simple door,
 By some new Power reduplicate, must be
 Even yet my life-porch in eternity,
 Even with one presence filled, as once of yore :
 Or mocking winds whirl round a chaff-strown floor
 Thee and thy years and these my words and me.

SONNET LXXXII.

HOARDED JOY.

I SAID : “ Nay, pluck not,— let the first fruit be :
 Even as thou sayest, it is sweet and red,
 But let it ripen still. The tree's bent head
 Sees in the stream its own fecundity
 And bides the day of fullness. Shall not we
 At the sun's hour that day possess the shade,
 And claim our fruit before its ripeness fade,
 And eat it from the branch and praise the tree ? ”

I say : “ Alas ! our fruit hath wooed the sun
 Too long,— 'tis fallen and floats adown the stream,
 Lo, the last clusters ! Pluck them every one,
 And let us sup with summer ; ere the gleam
 Of autumn set the year's pent sorrow free,
 And the woods wail like echoes from the sea.”

SONNET LXXXIII.

BARREN SPRING.

ONCE more the changed year's turning wheel returns :
 And as a girl sails balanced in the wind,
 And now before and now again behind
 Stoops as it swoops, with check that laughs and
 burls,—
 So Spring comes merry towards me here, but earns
 No answering smile from me, whose life is twin'd
 With the dead boughs that winter still must bind,
 And whom to-day the Spring no more concerns.

Behold, this crocus is a withering flame ;
 This snowdrop, snow ; this apple-blossom's part
 To breed the fruit that breeds the serpent's art.
 Nay, for these Spring-flowers, turn thy face from them,
 Nor stay till on the year's last lily-stem
 The white cup shrivels round the golden heart.

SONNET LXXXIV.

FAREWELL TO THE GLEN.

SWEET stream-fed glen, why say "farewell" to thee
 Who far'st so well and find'st for ever smooth
 The brow of Time where man may read no ruth ?
 Nay, do thou rather say "farewell" to me,
 Who now fare forth in bitterer fantasy
 Than erst was mine where other shade might soothe
 By other streams, what while in fragrant youth
 The bliss of being sad made melancholy.

And yet, farewell ! For better shalt thou fare
 When children bathe sweet faces in thy flow
 And happy lovers blend sweet shadows there
 In hours to come, than when an hour ago
 Thine echoes had but one man's sighs to bear
 And thy trees whispered what he feared to know.

SONNET LXXXV.

VAIN VIRTUES.

WHAT is the sorriest thing that enters Hell ?
 None of the sins,— but this and that fair deed
 Which a soul's sin at length could supersede.
 These yet are virgins, whom death's timely knell
 Might once have sainted ; whom the fields compel
 Together now, in snake-bound shuddering sheaves
 Of anguish, while the pit's pollution leaves
 Their refuse maidenhood abominable.

Night sucks them down, the tribute of the pit,
 Whose names, half entered in the book of Life,
 Were God's desire at noon. And as their hair
 And eyes sink last, the Torturer deigns no whit
 To gaze, but, yearning, waits his destined wife,
 The Sin still blithe on earth that sent them there

SONNET LXXXVI.

LOST DAYS.

THE lost days of my life until to-day,
 What were they, could I see them on the street
 Lie as they fell ? Would they be ears of wheat

Sown once for food but trodden into clay ?
 Or golden coins squandered and still to pay ?
 Or drops of blood dabbling the guilty feet ?
 Or such spilt water of in dreams must cheat
 The undying throats of Hell, athirst alway ?

I do not see them here ; but after death
 God knows I know the faces I shall see,
 Each one a murdered self, with low last breath.
 “ I am thyself,— what hast thou done to me ? ”
 “ And I — and I — thyself,” (lo ! each one saith,)
 “ And thou thyself to all eternity ! ”

SONNET LXXXVII.

DEATH'S SONGSTERS.

WHEN first that horse, within whose populous womb
 The birth was death, o'ershadowed Troy with fate,
 Her elders, dubious of its Grecian freight,
 Brought Helen there to sing the songs of home ;
 She whispered, “ Friends, I am alone ; come, come ! ”
 Then, crouched within, Ulysses waxed afraid,
 And on his comrades' quivering mouths he laid
 His hands, and held them till the voice was dumb.

The same was he who, lashed to his own mast,
 There where the sea-flowers screen the charnel-caves,
 Beside the sirens' singing island pass'd
 Till sweetness failed along the inveterate waves. . . .
 Say, soul,—are songs of Death no heaven to thee,
 Nor shames her lip the cheek of victory ?

SONNET LXXXVIII.

HERO'S LAMP.*

THAT lamp thou fill'st in Eros' name to-night,
 O Hero, shall the Sestian augurs take
 To-morrow, and for drowned Leander's sake
 To Anteros its fireless lip shall plight.
 Ay, waft the unspoken vow : yet dawn's first light
 On ebbing storm and life twice ebb'd must break ;
 While 'neath no sunrise, by the Avernian Lake,
 Lo where Love walks, Death's pallid neophyte.

That lamp within Anteros' shadowy shrine
 Shall stand unlit (for so the gods decree)
 Till some one man the happy issue see
 Of a life's love, and bid its flame to shine :
 Which still may rest unfir'd ; for, theirs or thine,
 O brother, what brought love to them or thee ?

SONNET LXXXIX.

THE TREES OF THE GARDEN.

YE who have passed Death's haggard hills ; and ye
 Whom trees that knew your sires shall cease to
 know
 And still stand silent : — is it all a show,—
 A wisp that laughs upon the wall ? — decree
 Of some inexorable supremacy
 Which ever, as man strains his blind surmise
 From depth to ominous depth, looks past his eyes,
 Sphinx-faced with unbash'd augury ?

* After the deaths of Leander and of Hero, the signal-lamp was dedicated to Anteros, with the edict that no man should light it unless his love had proved fortunate.

Nay, rather question the Earth's self. Invoke
 The storm-felled forest-trees moss-grown to-day
 Whose roots are hillocks where the children play ;
 Or ask the silver sapling 'neath what yoke
 Those stars, his spray-crown's clustering gems, shall
 wage
 Their journey still when his boughs shrink with age.

SONNET XC.

"RETRO ME, SATHANA !"

GET thee behind me. Even as, heavy-curved,
 Stooping against the wind, a charioteer
 Is snatched from out his chariot by the hair,
 So shall Time be ; and as the void car, hurled
 Abroad by reinless steeds, even so the world :
 Yea, even as chariot-dust upon the air,
 It shall be sought and not found anywhere.
 Get thee behind me, Satan. Oft unfurled,
 Thy perilous wings can beat and break like lath
 Much mightiness of men to win thee praise.
 Leave these weak feet to tread in narrow ways.
 Thou still, upon the broad vine-sheltered path,
 Mayst wait the turning of the phials of wrath
 For certain years, for certain months and days.

SONNET XCI.

LOST ON BOTH SIDES.

As when two men have loved a woman well,
 Each hating each, through Love's and Death's
 deceit ;
 Since not for either this stark marriage-sheet

And the long pauses of this wedding-bell ;
 Yet o'er her grave the night and day dispel
 At last their feud forlorn, with cold and heat ;
 Nor other than dear friends to death may fleet
 The two lives left that most of her can tell :—

So separate hopes, which in a soul had wooed
 The one same Peace, strove with each other long,
 And Peace before their faces perished since :
 So through that soul, in restless brotherhood,
 They roam together now, and wind among
 It by-streets, knocking at the dusty inns.

SONNETS XCII., XCIII.

THE SUN'S SHAME.

I.

BEHOLDING youth and hope in mockery caught
 From life ; and mocking pulses that remain
 When the soul's death of bodily death is fain ;
 Honor unknown, and honor known unsought ;
 And penury's sedulous self-torturing thought
 On gold, whose master therewith buys his bane ;
 And longed-for woman longing all in vain
 For lonely man with love's desire distraught ;
 And wealth, and strength, and power, and pleasant-
 ness,
 Given unto bodies of whose souls men say,
 None poor and weak, slavish and foul, as they :—
 Beholding these things, I behold no less
 The blushing morn and blushing eve confess
 The shame that loads the intolerable day.

II.

As some true chief of men, bowed down with stress
 Of life's disastrous eld, on blossoming youth
 May gaze, and murmur with self-pity and ruth,—
 "Might I thy fruitless treasure but possess,
 Such blessing of mine all coming years should
 bless ;" —

Then sends one sigh forth to the unknown goal,
 And bitterly feels breathe against his soul
 The hour swift-winged of nearer nothingness : —

Even so the World's gray Soul to the green World
 Perchance one hour must cry : "Woe's me, for
 whom

Inveteracy of ill portends the doom,—
 Whose heart's old fire in shadow of shame is furl'd :
 While thou even as of yore art journeying,
 All soulless now, yet merry with the Spring !"

 SONNET XCIV.

MICHELANGELO'S KISS.

GREAT Michelangelo, with age grown bleak
 And uttermost labors, having once o'ersaid
 All grievous memories on his long life shed,
 This worst regret to one true heart could speak : —
 That when, with sorrowing love and reverence meek,
 He stooped o'er sweet Colonna's dying bed,
 His Muse and dominant Lady, spirit-wed,—
 Her hand he kissed, but not her brow or cheek.

O Buonarruoti,— good at Art's fire-wheels
 To urge her chariot ! — even thus the Soul,
 Touching at length some sorely-chastened goal,
 Earns oftenest but a little : her appeals
 Were deep and mute,— lowly her claim. Let be :
 What holds for her Death's garner ? And for thee ?

SONNET XCV.

THE VASE OF LIFE.

AROUND the vase of Life at your slow pace
He has not crept, but turned it with his hands,
And all its sides already understands.
There, girt, one breathes alert for some great race ;
Whose road runs far by sands and fruitful space ;
Who laughs, yet through the jolly throng has
pass'd ;
Who weeps, nor stays for weeping ; who at last,
A youth, stands somewhere crowned, with silent face.
And he has filled this vase with wine for blood,
With blood for tears, with spice for burning vow,
With watered flowers for buried love most fit ;
And would have cast it shattered to the flood,
Yet in Fate's name has kept it whole ; which now
Stands empty till his ashes fall in it.

SONNET XCVI.

LIFE THE BELOVED.

As thy friend's face, with shadow of soul o'erspread,
Somewhile unto thy sight perchance hath been
Ghastly and strange, yet never so is seen
In thought, but to all fortunate favor wed ;
As thy love's death-bound features never dead
To memory's glass return, but contravene
Frail fugitive days, and always keep, I ween,
Than all new life a livelier lovelihed : —
So Life herself, thy spirit's friend and love,
Even still as Spring's authentic harbinger
Glows with fresh hours for hope to glorify ;
Though pale she lay when in the winter grove
Her funeral flowers were snow-flakes shed on her
And the red wings of frost-fire rent the sky.

SONNET XCVII.

A SUPERScription.

Look in my face ; my name is Might-have-been ;
I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell ;
Unto thine ear I hold the dead-sea shell
Cast up thy Life's foam-fretted feet between ;
Unto thine eyes the glass where that is seen
Which had Life's form and Love's, but by my spell
Is now a shaken shadow intolerable,
Of ultimate things unuttered the frail screen.

Mark me, how still I am ! But should there dart
One moment through thy soul the soft surprise
Of that winged Peace which lulls the breath of
sighs,—
Then shalt thou see me smile, and turn apart
Thy visage to mine ambush at thy heart
Sleepless with cold commemorative eyes.

SONNET XCVIII.

HE AND I.

WHENCE came his feet into my field, and why ?
How is it that he sees it all so drear ?
How do I see his seeing, and how hear
The name his bitter silence knows it by ?
This was the little fold of separate sky
Whose pasturing clouds in the soul's atmosphere
Drew living light from one continual year :
How should he find it lifeless ? He, or I ?
Lo ! this new Self now wanders round my field,
With plaints for every flower, and for each tree
A moan, the sighing wind's auxiliary :
And o'er sweet waters of my life, that yield
Unto his lips no draught but tears unseal'd,
Even in my place he weeps. Even I, not he.

SONNET XCIX., C.

NEWBORN DEATH.

I.

TO-DAY Death seems to me an infant child
Which her worn mother Life upon my knee
Has set to grow my friend and play with me;
If haply so my heart might be beguil'd
To find no terrors in a face so mild,—
If haply so my weary heart might be
Unto the newborn milky eyes of thee,
O Death, before resentment reconcil'd.

How long, O Death? And shall thy feet depart
Still a young child's with mine, or wilt thou stand
Fullgrown the helpful daughter of my heart,
What time with thee indeed I reach the strand
Of the pale wave which knows thee what thou art,
And drink it in the hollow of thy hand?

II.

AND thou, O Life, the lady of all bliss,
With whom, when our first heart beat full and fast,
I wandered till the haunts of men were pass'd,
And in fair places found all bowers amiss
Till only woods and waves might hear our kiss,
While to the winds all thought of Death we cast :—
Ah, Life! and must I have from thee at last
No smile to greet me and no babe but this?

Lo! Love, the child once ours: and Song, whose hair
Blew like a flame and blossomed like a wreath;
And Art, whose eyes were worlds by God found fair;
These o'er the book of Nature mixed their breath
With neck-twined arms, as oft we watched them
there:

And did these die that thou mightst bear me Death?

SONNET CL.

THE ONE HOPE.

WHEN vain desire at last and vain regret
 Go hand in hand to death, and all is vain,
 What shall assuage the unforgotten pain
 And teach the unforgetful to forget?
 Shall Peace be still a sunk stream long met,—
 Or may the soul at once in a green plain
 Stoop through the spray of some sweet life-foun-
 tain
 And cull the dew-drenched flowering amulet?

Ah! when the wan soul in that golden air
 Between the scripted petals softly blown
 Peers breathless for the gift of grace unknown,—
 Ah! let none other alien spell so'er
 But only the one Hope's one name be there—
 Not less nor more, but even that word

LYRICS, ETC.

SOOTHSAY.

LET no man ask thee of anything
Not yearborn between Spring and Spring
More of all worlds than he can know,
Each day the single sun doth show.
A trustier gloss than thou canst give
From all wise scrolls demonstrative,
The sea doth sigh and the wind sing.

Let no man awe thee on any height
Of earthly kingship's moldering might.
The dust his heel holds meet for thy brow
Hath all of it been what both are now ;
And thou and he may plague together
A beggar's eyes in some dusty weather
When none that is now knows sound or sight

Crave thou no dower of earthly things
Unworthy Hope's imaginings.
To have brought true birth of Song to be
And to have won hearts to Poesy,
Or anywhere in the sun or rain
To have loved and been beloved again,
Is loftiest reach of Hope's bright wings.

The wild waifs cast up by the sea
Are diverse ever seasonably.
Even so the soul-tides still may land
A different drift upon the sand.
But one the sea is evermore :
And one be still, 'twixt shore and shore,
As the sea's life, thy soul in thee.

Say, hast thou pride? How then may fit
 Thy mood with flatterers' silk-spun wit?
 Haply the sweet voice lifts thy crest,
 A breeze of fame made manifest.
 Nay, but then chaf'st at flattery? Pause:
 Be sure thy wrath is not because
 It makes thee feel thou lovest it.

Let thy soul strive that still the same
 Be early friendship's sacred flame.
 The affinities have strongest part
 In youth, and draw men heart to heart:
 As life wears on and finds no rest,
 The individual in each breast
 Is tyrannous to sunder them.

In the life-drama's stern cue-call,
 A friend's a part well-prized by all:
 And if thou meet an enemy,
 What art thou that none such should be?
 Even so: but if the two parts run
 Into each other and grow one,
 Then comes the curtain's cue to fall.

Whate'er by other's need is claimed
 More than thine,—to him unblamed
 Resign it: and if he should hold
 What more than he thou lack'st, bread, gold,
 Or any good whereby we live,—
 To thee such substance let him give
 Freely: nor he nor thou be shamed.

Strive that thy works prove equal: lest
 That work which thou hast done the best
 Should come to be to thee at length
 (Even as to envy seems the strength
 Of others) hateful and abhor'd,—
 Thine own above thyself made lord,—
 Of self-rebuke the bitterest.

Unto the man of yearning thought
 And aspiration, to do naught!
 Is in itself almost an act,—
 Being chasm-fire and cataract
 Of the soul's utter depths unseal'd.
 Yet woe to thee if once thou yield
 Unto the act of doing naught!

How callous seems beyond revoke
 The clock with its last listless stroke!
 How much too late at length!—to trace
 The hour on its forewarning face,
 The thing thou hast not dared to do!
 Behold, this *may* be thus! Ere true
 It prove, arise and bear thy yoke.

Let lore of all Theology
 Be to thy soul what it *can* be:
 But know,— that Power that fashions **man**
 Measured not out thy little span
 For thee to take the meting-rod
 In turn, and so approve on God
 Thy science of Theometry.

To God at best, to Chance at worst,
 Give thanks for good things, last as **first**.
 But windstrown blossom is that good
 Whose apple is not gratitude.
 Even if no prayer uplift thy face,
 Let the sweet right to render grace
 As thy soul's cherish'd child be nursed.

Didst ever say, "Lo, I forget?"
 Such thought was to remember **yet**.
 As in a gravegarth, count to see
 The monuments of memory.
 Be this thy soul's appointed scope:—
 Gaze onward without claim to hope,
 Nor, gazing backward, court regret.

CHIMES.

I.

Honey-flowers to the honey-comb
And the honey-bees from home.

A honey-comb and a honey-flower,
And the bee shall have his hour.

A honeyed heart for the honey-comb,
And the humming bee flies home.

A heavy heart in the honey-flower,
And the bee has had his hour.

II.

A honey-cell 's in the honeysuckle,
And the honey-bee knows it well.

The honey-comb has a heart of honey;
And the humming-bee 's so bonny.

A honey-flower 's the honeysuckle,
And the bee 's in the honey-bell.

The honeysuckle is sucked of honey,
And the bee is heavy and bonny.

III.

Brown shell first for the butterfly
And a bright wing by and by.

Butterfly, good-by to your shell,
And, bright wings, speed you well.

Bright lamplight for the butterfly
And a burnt wing by and by.

Butterfly, alas for your shell,
And, bright wings, fare you well.

IV.

Lost love-labor and lullaby,
And lowly let love lie.

Lost love-morrow and love-fellow
And love's life lying low.

Lovelorn labor and life laid by
And lowly let love lie.

Late love-longing and life-sorrow
And love's life lying low.

V.

Beauty's body and benison
With a bosom-flower new-blown.

Bitter beauty and blessing bann'd
With a breast to burn and brand.

Beauty's bower in the dust o'erblown
With a bare white breast of bone.

Barren beauty and bower of sand
With a blast on either hand.

VI.

Buried bars in the breakwater
And bubble of the brimming weir.

Body's blood in the breakwater
And a buried body's bier.

Buried bones in the breakwater
And bubble of the brawling weir.

Bitter tears in the breakwater
And a breaking heart to bear.

VII.

Hollow heaven and the hurricane
And hurry of the heavy rain.

Hurried clouds in the hollow heaven
And a heavy rain hard driven.

The heavy rain it hurries amain
And heaven and the hurricane.

Hurrying wind o'er the heaven's hollow
And the heavy rain to follow.



PARTED PRESENCE.

Love, I speak to your heart,
Your heart that is always here,
Oh draw me deep to its sphere,
Though you and I are apart ;
And yield, by the spirit's art,
Each distant gift that is dear.
O love, my love, you are here !

Your eyes are afar to-day,
Yet, love, look now in mine eyes.
Two hearts sent forth may despise
All dead things by the way.
All between is decay,
Dead hours and this hour that dies,
O love, look deep in mine eyes !

Your hands to-day are not here,
 Yet lay them, love, in my hands.
 The hourglass sheds its sands
 All day for the dead hours' bier ;
 But now, as two hearts draw near,
 This hour like a flower expands.
 O love, your hands in my hands !

Your voice is not on the air,
 Yet, love, I can hear your voice :
 It bids my heart to rejoice
 As knowing your heart is there,—
 A music sweet to declare
 The truth of your steadfast choice.
 O love, how sweet is your voice !

To-day your lips are afar,
 Yet draw my lips to them, love.
 Around, beneath, and above,
 Is frost to bind and to bar ;
 But where I am and you are,
 Desire and the fire thereof.
 O kiss me, kiss me, my love !

Your heart is never away,
 But ever with mine, for ever,
 For ever without endeavor,
 To-morrow, love, as to-day ;
 Two blent hearts never astray,
 Two souls no power may sever,
 Together, O my love, for ever !

A DEATH-PARTING.

LEAVES and rain and the days of the year.
 (*Water-willow and wellaway,*)
 All these fall, and my soul gives ear,
 And she is hence who once was here.
 (*With a wind blown night and day.*)

Ah ! but now, for a secret sign,
(The willow's wan and the water white,)
 In the held breath of the day's decline
 Her very face seemed pressed to mine.
(With a wind blown day and night.)

O love, of my death my life is fain ;
(The willows wave on the water-way,)
 Your cheek and mine are cold in the rain,
 But warm they 'll be when we meet again.
(With a wind blown night and day.)

Mists are heaved and cover the sky ;
(The willows wail in the waning light,)
 O loose your lips, leave space for a sigh,—
 They seal my soul, I cannot die.
(With a wind blown day and night.)

Leaves and rain and the days of the year,
(Water-willow and wellaway,)
 All still fall, and I still give ear,
 And she is hence, and I am here.
(With a wind blown night and day.)

SPHERAL CHANGE.

In this new shade of Death, the show
 Passes me still of form and face ;
 Some bent, some gazing as they go,
 Some swiftly, some at a dull pace,
 Not one that speaks in any case.

If only one might speak ! — the one
 Who never waits till I come near ;
 But always seated all alone
 As listening to the sunken air,
 Is gone before I come to her.

O dearest ! while we lived and died
 A living death in every day,
 Some hours we still were side by side,
 When where I was you too might stay
 And rest and need not go away.

O nearest, furthest ! Can there be
 At length some hard-earned heart-won home,
 Where,—exile changed for sanctuary,—
 Our lot may fill indeed its sum,
 And you may wait and I may come ?

SUNSET WINGS.

To-NIGHT this sunset spreads two golden wings
 Cleaving the western sky ;
 Winged too with wind it is, and winnowings
 Of birds ; as if the day's last hour in rings
 Of strenuous flight must die.

Sun-steeped in fire, the homeward pinions sway
 Above the dovecote-tops ;
 And clouds of starlings, ere they rest with day,
 Sink, clamorous like mill waters, at wild play,
 By turns in every copse :

Each tree heart-deep the wrangling rout receives,—
 Save for the whirr within,
 You could not tell the starlings from the leaves ;
 Then one great puff of wings, and the swarm
 heaves
 Away with all its din.

Even thus Hope's hours, in ever-eddying flight,
 To many a refuge tend ;
 With the first light she laughed, and the last light
 Glows round her still ; who nathless in the night
 At length must make an end.

And now the mustering rooks innumerable
Together sail and soar,
While for the day's death, like a tolling knell,
Unto the heart they seem to cry, Farewell,
No more, farewell, no more !

Is Hope not plumed, as 't were a fiery dart ?
And oh ! thou dying day,
Even as thou goest must she too depart,
And Sorrow fold such pinions on the heart
As will not fly away ?

SONG AND MUSIC.

O LEAVE your hand where it lies cool
Upon the eyes whose lids are hot :
Its rosy shade is bountiful
Of silence, and assuages thought.
O lay your lips against your hand
And let me feel your breath through it,
While through the sense your song shall fit
The soul to understand.

The music lives upon my brain
Between your hands within mine eyes :
It stirs your lifted throat like pain,
An aching pulse of melodies.
Lean nearer, let the music pause :
The soul may better understand
Your music, shadowed in your hand,
Now while the song withdraws.

THREE SHADOWS.

I LOOKED and saw your eyes
 In the shadow of your hair,
As a traveler sees the stream
 In the shadow of the wood ;
And I said, " My faint heart sighs,
 Ah me ! to linger there,
To drink deep and to dream
 In that sweet solitude."

I looked and saw your heart
 In the shadow of your eyes,
As a seeker sees the gold
 In the shadow of the stream ;
And I said, " Ah me ! what art
 Should win the immortal prize,
Whose want must make life cold
 And Heaven a hollow dream ?"

I looked and saw your love
 In the shadow of your heart,
As a diver sees the pearl
 In the shadow of the sea ;
And I murmured, not above
 My breath, but all apart,—
" Ah ! you can love, true girl,
And is your love for me ?"

ALAS, SO LONG !

Ah ! dear one, we were young so long,
 It seemed that youth would never go,
For skies and trees were ever in song
 And water in singing flow
In the days we never again shall know.
 Alas, so long !
Ah ! then was it all Spring weather ?
Nay, but we were young and together.

Ah ! dear one, I've been old so long,
 It seems that age is loth to part,
Though days and years have never a song,
 And oh ! have they still the art
 That warmed the pulses of heart to heart ?
 Alas, so long !
 Ah ! then was it all Spring weather ?
 Nay, but we were young and together.

Ah ! dear one, you've been dead so long,—
 How long until we meet again,
 Where hours may never lose their song
 Nor flowers forget the rain
In glad noonlight that never shall wane ?
 Alas, so long !
 Ah ! shall it be then Spring weather,
 And ah ! shall we be young together ?

ADIEU.

WAVING whispering trees,
What do you say to the breeze
 And what says the breeze to you ?
 'Mid passing souls ill at ease,
Moving murmuring trees,
 Would ye ever wave an **Adieu**.

Tossing turbulent seas,
Winds that wrestle with these,
 Echo heard in the shell,—
 'Mid fleeting life ill at ease,
Restless ravening seas,—
 Would the echo sigh **Farewell !**

Surging sumptuous skies,
For ever a new surprise,
 Clouds eternally new,—
Is every flake that flies,
Widening wandering skies,
 For a sign — **Farewell, Adieu !**

Sinking suffering heart
 That know'st how weary thou art,—
 Soul so fain for a flight,—
 Ay, spread your wings to depart,
 Sad soul and sorrowing heart,—
 Adieu, Farewell, Good-night.

INSOMNIA.

THIN are the night-skirts left behind
 By daybreak hours that onward creep,
 And thin, alas ! the shred of sleep
 That wavers with the spirit's wind :
 But in half-dreams that shift and roll
 And still remember and forget,
My soul this hour has drawn your soul
 A little nearer yet.

Our lives, most dear, are never near,
 Our thoughts are never far apart,
 Though all that draws us heart to heart
 Seems fainter now and now more clear.
To-night Love claims his full control,
 And with desire and with regret
My soul this hour has drawn your soul
 A little nearer yet.

Is there a home where heavy earth
 Melts to bright air that breathes no pain,
 Where water leaves no thirst again
 And springing fire is Love's new birth ?
If faith long bound to one true goal
 May there at length its hope beget,
My soul that hour shall draw your soul
 For ever nearer yet.

POSSESSION.

THERE is a cloud above the sunset hill,
 That wends and makes no stay,
For its goal lies beyond the fiery west ;
A lingering breath no calm can chase away,
The onward labor of the wind's last will ;
A flying foam that overleaps the crest
Of the top wave : and in possession still
A further reach of longing ; though at rest
From all the yearning years,
Together in the bosom of that day
Ye cling, and with your kisses drink your tears

THE CLOUD CONFINES.

THE day is dark and the night
 To him that would search their heart ;
 No lips of cloud that will part
Nor morning song in the light :
 Only, gazing alone,
 To him wild shadows are shown,
 Deep under deep unknown
And height above unknown height.
 Still we say as we go,—
 “ Strange to think by the way
 Whatever there is to know,
 That shall we know one day.”

The Past is over and fled ;
 Named new, we name it the old ;
 Thereof some tale hath been told,
But no word comes from the dead ;
 Whether at all they be,
 Or whether as bond or free.
 Or whether they too were we.

Or by what spell they have sped,
 Still we say as we go,—
 “Strange to think by the way
 Whatever there is to know,
 That shall we know one day.”

What of the heart of hate
 That beats in thy breast, O Time?—
 Red strife from the furthest prime,
 And anguish of fierce debate;
 War that shatters her slain,
 And peace that grinds them as grain,
 And eyes fixed ever in vain
 On the pitiless eyes of Fate.
 Still we say as we go,—
 “Strange to think by the way
 Whatever there is to know,
 That shall we know one day.”

What of the heart of love
 That bleeds in thy breast, O Man?—
 Thy kisses snatched 'neath the ban
 Of fangs that mock them above;
 Thy bells prolonged unto knells,
 Thy hope that a breath dispels,
 Thy bitter forlorn farewells
 And the empty echoes thereof?
 Still we say as we go,—
 “Strange to think by the way
 Whatever there is to know,
 That shall we know one day.”

The sky leans dumb on the sea,
 Aweary with all its wings;
 And oh! the song the sea sings
 Is dark everlastingly.
 Our past is clean forgot,
 Our present is and is not,
 Our future's a sealed seedplot.

And what betwixt them are we? —

We who say as we go, —

“ Strange to think by the way,

Whatever there is to know,

That shall we know one day.”

FOR

THE HOLY FAMILY,

BY MICHELANGELO.

*(In the National Gallery.)**

TURN not the prophet's page: O Son! He knew
 All that thou hast to suffer, and hath writ,
 Not yet thine hour of knowledge. Infinite
 The sorrows that thy manhood's lot must rue
 And dire acquaintance of thy grief. That clue
 The spirits of thy mournful ministrings
 Seek through yon scroll in silence. For these things
 The angels have desired to look into.

Still before Eden waves the fiery sword, —

Her Tree of Life unransomed: whose sad Tree

Of Knowledge yet to growth of Calvary

Must yield its Tempter, — Hell the earliest dead
 Of Earth resign, — and yet, O Son and Lord,

The Seed o' the woman bruise the serpent's head.

* In this picture the Virgin Mother is seen withholding from the Child Saviour the prophetic writings in which his sufferings are foretold. Angelic figures beside them examine a scroll.

FOR
SPRING,

BY SANDRO BOTTICELLI.

(*In the Accademia of Florence.*)

WHAT mask of what old wind-withered New-Year
Honors this Lady? * Flora, wanton-eyed
For birth, and with all flowrets pranked and pied :
Aurora, Zephyrus, with mutual cheer
Of clasp and kiss : the Graces circling near,
'Neath bower-linked arch of white arms glorified :
And with those feathered feet which hovering glide
O'er Spring's brief bloom, Hermes the harbinger.

Birth-bare, not death-bare yet, the young stems stand,
This Lady's temple-columns : o'er her head
Love wings his shaft. What mystery here is read
Of homage or of hope? But how command
Dead Springs to answer? And how question here
These mummers of that wind-withered New-Year?

* The same lady, here surrounded by the mask of Spring, is evidently the subject of a portrait by Botticelli formerly in the Pourtales collection in Paris. This portrait is inscribed "Smeralda Bandinelli."

FIVE ENGLISH POETS.

I. THOMAS CHATTERTON.

WITH Shakspeare's manhood at a boy's wild heart,—
 Through Hamlet's doubt to Shakspeare near allied,
 And kin to Milton through his Satan's pride,—
 At Death's sole door he stooped, and craved a dart ;
 And to the dear new bower of England's art,—
 Even to that shrine Time else had deified,
 The unuttered heart that soared against his side,—
 Drove the fell point, and smote life's seals apart.

The nested home-loves, noble Chatterton ;
 The angel-trodden stair thy soul could trace
 Up Redcliffe's spire ; and in the world's armed space
 The gallant sword-play : — these to many an one
 Are sweet for ever ; as thy grave unknown
 And love-dream of thine unrecorded face.

II. WILLIAM BLAKE.

(TO FREDERICK SHIELDS, ON HIS SKETCH OF BLAKE'S WORK-
 ROOM AND DEATH-ROOM, 3, FOUNTAIN COURT, STRAND.)

Here is the place. Even here the dauntless soul,
 The unflinching hand, wrought on ; till in that nook,
 As on that very bed, his life partook
 Death, and passed. Yon river's dusky shoal,
 Where the close-built coiling lanes unroll,
 Faced his work-window, whence his eyes would
 stare.
 Thought-wandering. And naught that met them
 there,
 But the unfettered universal goal.

This cupboard, Holy of Holies, held the cloud
 Of his soul writ and limned ; this other one,
 His true wife's charge, full oft to their abode
 Yielded for daily bread the martyr's stone,
 Ere yet their food might be that Bread alone,
 The words now home-speech of the mouth of God.

III. SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

His soul fared forth (as from the deep home-grove
 The father-songster plies the hour-long quest,)
 To feed his soul-brood hungering in the nest ;
 But his warm Heart, the mother-bird, above
 Their callow fledgling progeny still hove
 With tented roof of wings and fostering breast
 Till the Soul fed the soul-brood. Richly blest
 From Heaven their growth, whose food was human
 Love.

Yet ah ! Like desert pools that show the stars
 Once in long leagues,— even such the scarce-
 snatched hours
 Which deepening pain left to his lordliest
 powers :—
 Heaven lost through spider-trammeled prison-bars.
 Six years, from sixty saved ! Yet kindling skies
 Own them, a beacon to our centuries.

IV. JOHN KEATS.

THE weltering London ways where children weep
 And girls whom none call maidens laugh,— strang-
 road
 Miring his outward steps, who inly trode
 The bright Castalian brink and Latmos' steep :—
 Even such his life's cross-paths ; till deathly deep,
 He toiled through sands of Lethe ; and long pain,
 Weary with labor spurned and love found vain,
 In dead Rome's sheltering shadow wrapped his sleep.

O pang-dowered Poet, whose reverberant lips
 And heart-strung lyre awoke the Moon's eclipses,—
 Thou whom the daisies glory in growing o'er,—
 Their fragrance clings around thy name, not writ
 But rumor'd in water, while the fame of it
 Along Time's flood goes echoing evermore.

V. PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

(INSCRIPTION FOR THE COUCH, STILL PRESERVED, ON WHICH
 HE PASSED THE LAST NIGHT OF HIS LIFE.)

'TWIXT those twin worlds,— the world of Sleep,
 which gave
 No dream to warn,— the tidal world of Death,
 Which the earth's sea, as the earth, replenisheth,—
 Shelley, Song's orient sun, to break the wave,
 Rose from this couch that morn. Ah ! did he brave
 Only the sea ? — or did man's æe'd of hell
 Engulf his bark 'mid mists impenetrable ?
 No eye discerned, nor any power might save.

When that mist cleared, O Shelley ! what dread veil
 Was rent for thee, to whom far-darkling Truth
 Reigned sovereign guide through thy brief ageless
 youth ?
 Was the Truth *thy* Truth, Shelley ? — Hush ! All.
 Hail,
 Past doubt, thou gav'st it ; and in Truth's bright
 sphere
 Art first of praisers, being most praised here.

TIBER, NILE AND THAMES.

His heads and hands of murdered Cicero,
 Above his seat in the Forum hung,
 Drew jeers and burning tears. When on the rung
 Of a swift mounted ladder, all aglow,
 Fulvia, Mark Antony's shameless wife, with show
 Of foot firm-poised and gleaming arm upflung,
 Bade her sharp needle pierce that god-like tongue
 Whose speech fed Rome even as the Tiber's flow.

And thou, Cleopatra's Needle, that hadst thrid
 Great skirts of Time ere she and Antony hid
 Dead hope! — hast thou too reached, surviving
 death,

A city of sweet speech scorned,—on whose chill stone
 Keats withered, Coleridge pined, and Chatterton,
 Breadless, with poison froze the God-fired breath?

THE LAST THREE FROM TRAFALGAR

AT THE ANNIVERSARY BANQUET,
 21ST OCTOBER, 187*.

In grappled ships around the Victory,
 Three boys did England's Duty with stout cheer,
 While one dread truth was kept from every ear,
 More dire than deafening fire that churned the sea;
 For in the flag-ship's weltering cockpit, he
 Who was the Battle's Heart without a peer,
 He who had seen all fearful sights save Fear,
 Was passing from all life save Victory.

And round the old memorial board to-day,
 Three graybeards — each a warworn British Tar —
 View through the mist of years that hour afar:
 Who soon shall greet, 'mid memories of fierce fray.
 The impassioned soul which on its radiant way
 Soared through the fiery cloud of Trafalgar

CZAR ALEXANDER THE SECOND.

(13TH MARCH, 1881.)

FROM him did forty million serfs, endow'd
 Each with six feet of death-due soil, receive
 Rich freeborn lifelong land, whereon to sheave
 Their country's harvest. These to-day aloud
 Demand of Heaven a Father's blood,—sore bow'd
 With tears and thrilled with wrath ; who, while they
 grieve,
 On every guilty head would fain achieve
 All torment by his edicts disallow'd.

He stayed the knout's red-ravening fangs ; and first
 Of Russian traitors, his own murderers go
 White to the tomb. While he,—laid foully low
 With limbs red-rent, with festering brain which erst
 Willed kingly freedom,—'gainst the deed accurst
 To God bears witness of his people's woe.

WORDS ON THE WINDOW-PANE.*

DID she in summer write it, or in spring,
 Or with this wail of autumn at her ears,
 Or in some winter left among old years
 Scratched it through tettered cark ? A certain thing
 That round her heart the frost was hardening,
 Not to be thawed of tears, which on this pane
 Channeled the rime, perchance, in fevered rain,
 For false man's sake and love's most bitter sting.

* For a woman's fragmentary inscription.

Howbeit, between this last word and the next
 Unwritten, subtly seasoned was the smart,
 And here at least the grace to weep : if she,
 Rather, midway in her disconsolate text,
 Rebelled not, loathing from the trodden heart
 That thing which she had found man's love to be

WINTER.

How large that thrush looks on the bare thorn-tree !
 A swarm of such, three little months ago,
 Had hidden in the leaves and let none know
 Save by the outburst of their minstrelsy.
 A white flake here and there — a snow-lily
 Of last night's frost — our naked flower-beds hold ;
 And for a rose-flower on the darkling mold
 The hungry redbreast gleams. No bloom, no bee.

The current shudders to its ice-bound sedge :
 Nipped in their bath, the stark reeds one by one
 Flash each its clinging diamond in the sun :
 'Neath winds which for this Winter's sovereign pledge
 Shall curb great king-masts to the ocean's edge
 And leave memorial forest-kings o'erthrown.

SPRING.

SOFT-LITTERED is the new-year's lambing-fold,
 And in the hollowed haystack at its side
 The shepherd lies o' nights now, wakeful-eyed
 At the ewes' travailing call through the dark cold.
 The young rooks cheep 'mid the thick caw o' the old
 And near unpeopled stream-sides, on the ground,
 By her spring-cry the moorhen's nest is found,
 Where the drained flood lands flaunt their marigold.

Chill are the gusts to which the pastures cower,
 And chill the current where the young reeds stand
 As green and close as the young wheat on land :
 Yet here the cuckoo and the cuckoo-flower
 Plight to the heart Spring's perfect imminent hour
 Whose breath shall soothe you like your dear one's
 hand.

THE CHURCH-PORCH.

SISTER, first shake we off the dust we have
 Upon our feet, lest it defile the stones
 Inscriptured, covering their sacred bones
 Who lie i' the aisles which keep the names they gave,
 Their trust abiding round them in the grave ;
 Whom painters paint for visible orisons,
 And to whom sculptors pray in stone and bronze ;
 Their voices echo still like a spent wave.

Without here, the church-bells are but a tune,
 And on the carven church-door this hot noon
 Lays all its heavy sunshine here without ;
 But having entered in, we shall find there
 Silence, and sudden dimness, and deep prayer,
 And faces of crowned angels all about.

UNTIMELY LOST.

(OLIVER MADOX BROWN. BORN 1855 :
 DIED 1874.)

UPON the landscape of his coming life
 A youth high-gifted gazed, and found it fair :
 The heights of work, the floods of praise, were there.
 What friendships, what desires, what love. what
 wife ? —

All things to come. The fanned springtide was rife
 With imminent solstice ; and the ardent air
 Had summer sweets and autumn fires to bear ; —
 Heart's ease full-pulsed with perfect strength for strife.

A mist has risen : we see the youth no more :
 Does *he* see on and strive on ? And may we
 Late-tottering worldworn hence, find *his* to be
 Th,e young strong hand which helps us up that shore ?
 Or echoing the No More with Nevermore,
 Must Night be curs and his ? We hope : and he ?

PLACE DE LA BASTILLE, PARIS.

How dear the sky has been above this place !
 Small treasures of this sky that we see here
 Seen weak through prison-bars from year to year ;
 Eyed with a painful prayer upon God's grace
 To save, and tears that stayed along the face
 Lifted at sunset. Yea, how passing dear,
 Those nights when through the bars a wind left clear
 The heaven, and moonlight soothed the limpid space !

So was it, till one night the secret kept
 Safe in low vault and stealthy corridor
 Was blown abroad on gospel-tongues of flame.
 O ways of God, mysterious evermore !
 How many on this spot have cursed and wept
 That all might stand here now and own Thy Name

A SEA-SPELL.

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"FOUND."

(FOR A PICTURE.)

‘THERE is a budding morrow in midnight :’ —
So sang our Keats, our English nightingale.
And here, as lamps across the bridge turn pale
In London’s smokeless resurrection-light,
Dark breaks to dawn. But o’er the deadly blight
Of love deflowered and sorrow of none avail
Which make this man gasp and this woman quail,
Can day from darkness ever again take flight ?

Ah ! gave not these two hearts their mutual pledge,
Under one mantie sheltered ’neath the hedge
In gloaming courtship ? And O God ! to-day
He only — we he holds her ; — but what part
Can life now take ? She cries in her locked heart, —
“ Leave me — I do not know you — go away ! ”

A SEA-SPELL.

(FOR A PICTURE.)

HER lute hangs shadowed in the apple-tree,
While flashing fingers weave the sweet-strung spell
Between its chords ; and as the wild notes swell,
The sea-bird for those branches leaves the sea.
But to what sound her listening ear stoops she ?
What netherworld gulf-whispers doth she hear,
In answering echoes from what planisphere,
Along the wind, along the estuary ?

She sinks into her spell : and when full soon
Her lips move and she soars into her song,
What creatures of the midmost main shall throng
In furrowed surf-clouds to the summoning rune :
Till he, the fated mariner, hears her cry,
And up her rock, bare-breasted, comes to die ?

FIAMMETTA.

(FOR A PICTURE.)

BEHOLD Fiammetta, shown in Vision here.

Gloom-girt 'mid Spring-flushed apple-growth she
stands ;

And as she sways the branches with her hands,
Along her arm the sundered bloom falls sheer
In separate petals shed, each like a tear ;

While from the quivering bough the bird expands
His wings. And lo ! thy spirit understands
Life shaken and shower'd and flown, and Death drawn
near.

All stirs with change. Her garments beat the air :

The angel circling round her aureole

Shimmers in flight against the tree's gray bole :

While she, with reassuring eyes most fair,

A presage and a promise stands ; as 'twere

'On Death's dark storm the rainbow of the Soul.

THE DAY-DREAM.

(FOR A PICTURE.)

THE thronged boughs of the shadowy sycamore

Still bear young leaflets half the summer through ;

From when the robin 'gainst the unhidden blue

Perched dark, till now, deep in the leafy core,

The embowered thristle's urgent wood-notes soar

Through summer silence. Still the leaves come new ;

Yet never rosy-sheathed as those which drew

Their spiral tongues from spring-buds heretofore.

Within the branching shade of Reverie
 Dreams even may spring till autumn : yet none be
 Like woman's budding day-dream spirit-fann'd.
 Lo ! tow'rd deep skies, not deeper than her look,
 She dreams ; till now on her forgotten book
 Drops the forgotten blossom from her hand.

ASTARTE SYRIACA.

(FOR A PICTURE.)

MYSTERY : lo ! betwixt the sun and moon
 Astarte of the Syrians : Venus Queen
 Ere Aphrodite was. In silver sheen
 Her twofold girdle clasps the infinite boon
 Of bliss whereof the heaven and earth commune :
 And from her neck's inclining flower-stem lean
 Love-freighted lips and absolute eyes that wear
 The pulse of hearts to the spheres' dominant tune

Torch-bearing, her sweet ministers compel
 All thrones of light beyond the sky and sea
 The witnesses of Beauty's face to be :
 That face, of Love's all-penetrative spell
 Amulet, talisman, and oracle,—
 Betwixt the sun and moon a mystery.

PROSERPINA.

(PER UN QUADRO.)

Lungi è la luce che in sù questo muro
 Rifrangè appena, un breve istante scorto
 Del rio palazzo alla soprana porta.

Lungi quei fiori d'Enna, O lido oscuro,
Dal frutto tuo fatal che omai m'è duro.

Lungi quel cielo dal tartareo manto
Che quì mi cuopre : e lungi ahì lungi ahì quante
Le notti che saràn dai dì che furo.

Lungi da me mi sento ; e ognor sognando

Cerco e ricerco, e rusto ascoltatrice ;

E qualche cuore a qualche anima dice,
(Di cui mi giunge il suon da quando in quando,
Continuamente insieme sospirando,) —

“ Oimè per te, Proserpina infelice ! ”

PROSERPINA

(FOR A PICTURE.)

Afar away the light that brings cold cheer

Unto this wall,— one instant and no more

Admitted at my distant palace-door.

Afar the flowers of Enna from this drear

Dire fruit, which, tasted once, must thrall me here

Afar those skies from this Tartarean gray

That chills me : and afar, how far away,

The nights that shall be from the days that were

Afar from mine own self I seem, and wing

Strange ways in thought, and listen for a sign :

And still some heart unto some soul doth pine,

(Whose sounds mine inner sense is fain to bring,
Continually together murmuring,) —

“ Woe's me for thee, unhappy Proserpine ! ”

LA BELLA MANO.

(PER UN QUADRO.)

O BELLA Mano, che ti lavi e piaci
 In quel medesimo tuo puro elemento
 Donde la Dea dell' amorso avvento
 Nacque, (e dall' onda s'infuocar le faci
 Di mille inispegnibili sornaci) : —
 Come a Venere a te l'oro e l'arganto
 Offron gli Amori ; e ognun riguarda attento
 La bocca che sorride e te che taci.

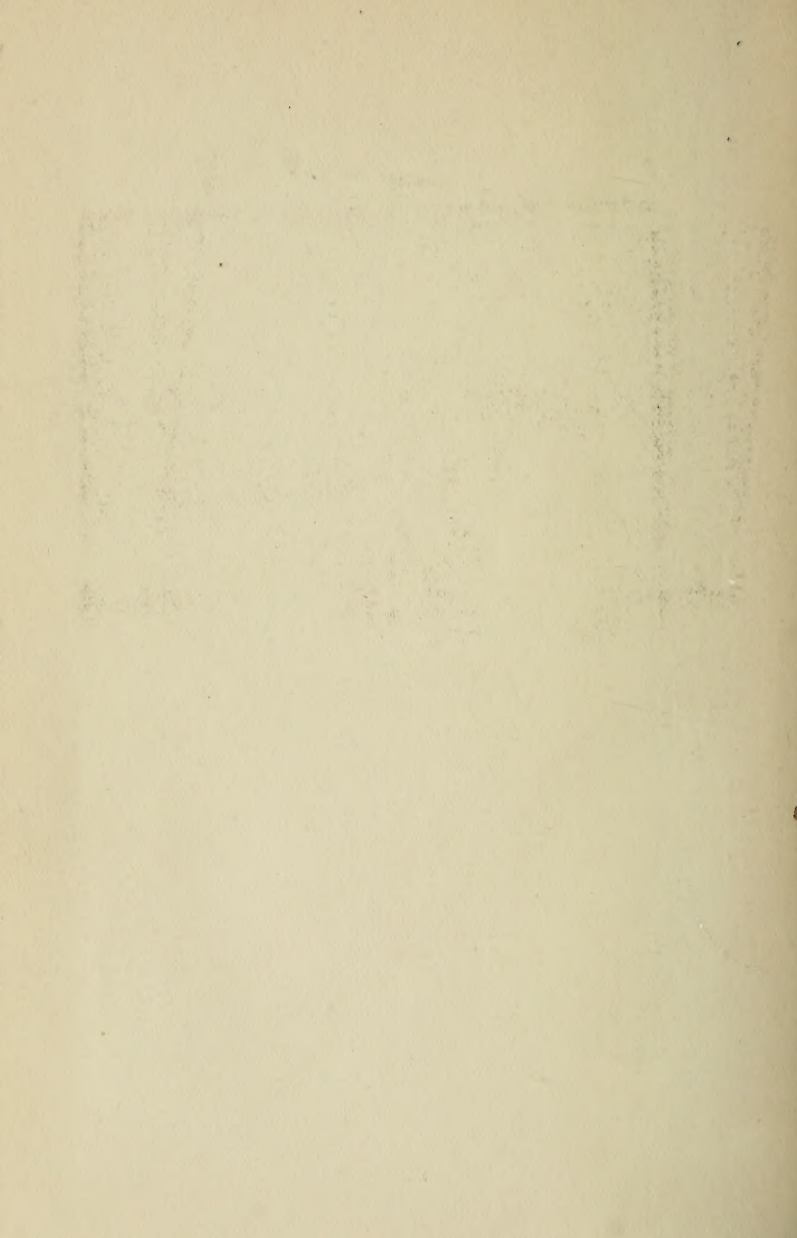
In dolce modo dove onor t' invii
 Vattene odorna, e porta insiem fra tante
 Di Venere e di vergine sembiente :
 Umil emente in luoghi onesti e pii
 Bianca e soave ognora ; infin che sii
 O Mano, mansueta in man d'amante.

LA BELLA MANO.

(FOR A PICTURE.)

O LOVELY hand, that thy sweet self dost lave
 In that thy pure and proper element,
 Whence erst the Lady of Love's high advent
 Was born and endless fires sprang from the wave: —
 Even as her Loves to her their offerings gave,
 For thee the jeweled gifts they bear ; while each
 Looks to those lips, of music-measured speech
 The fount, and of more bliss than man can crave.

In royal wise ring-girt and bracelet-spann'd,
A flower of Venus' own virginity,
Go shine among thy sisterly sweet band ;
In maiden-minded converse delicately
Evermore white and soft ; until thou be,
O hand ! heart-handsel'd in a lover's hand.



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Rossetti, Dante Gabriel
Poetical works



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